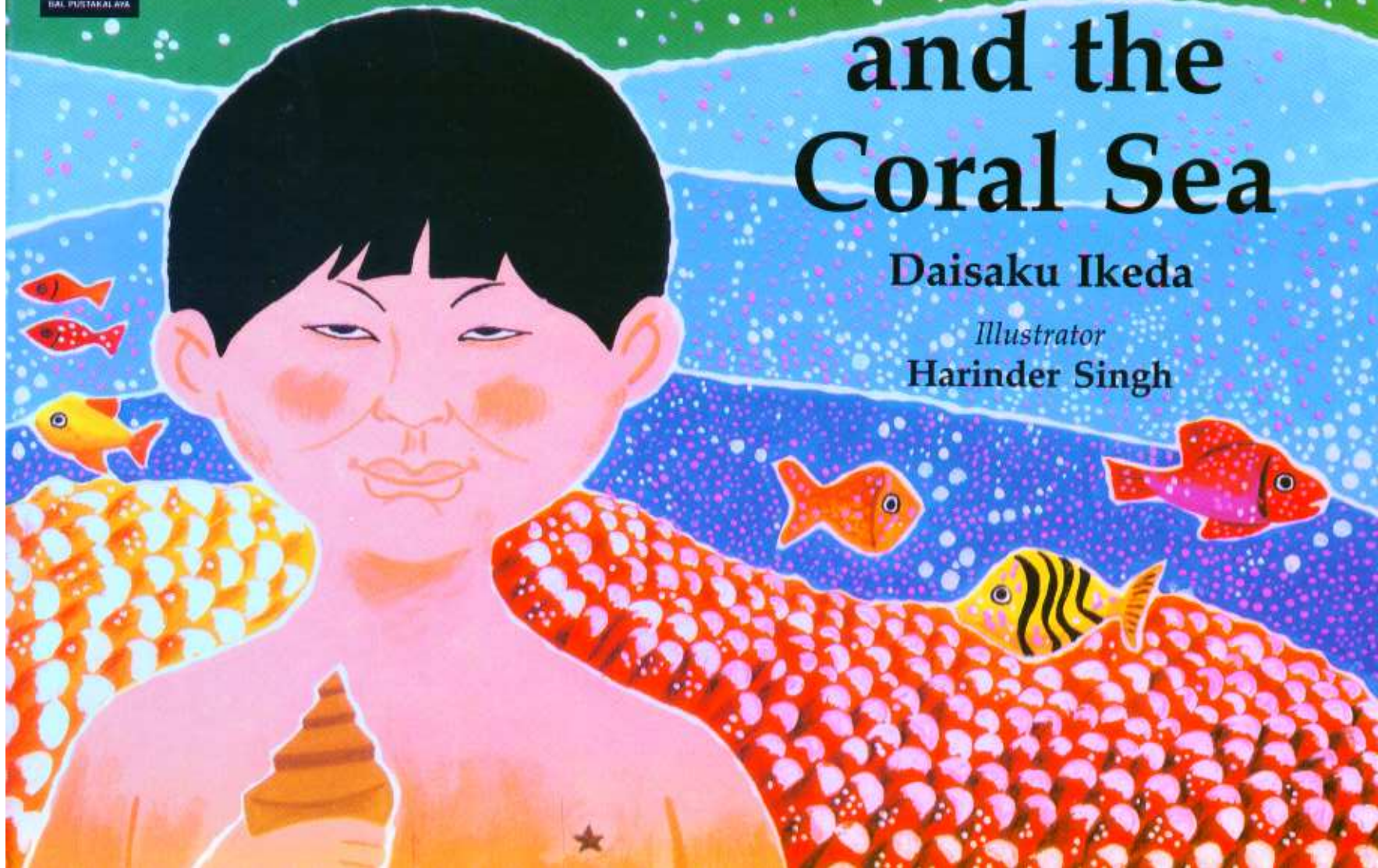




The Prince and the Coral Sea

Daisaku Ikeda

Illustrator
Harinder Singh



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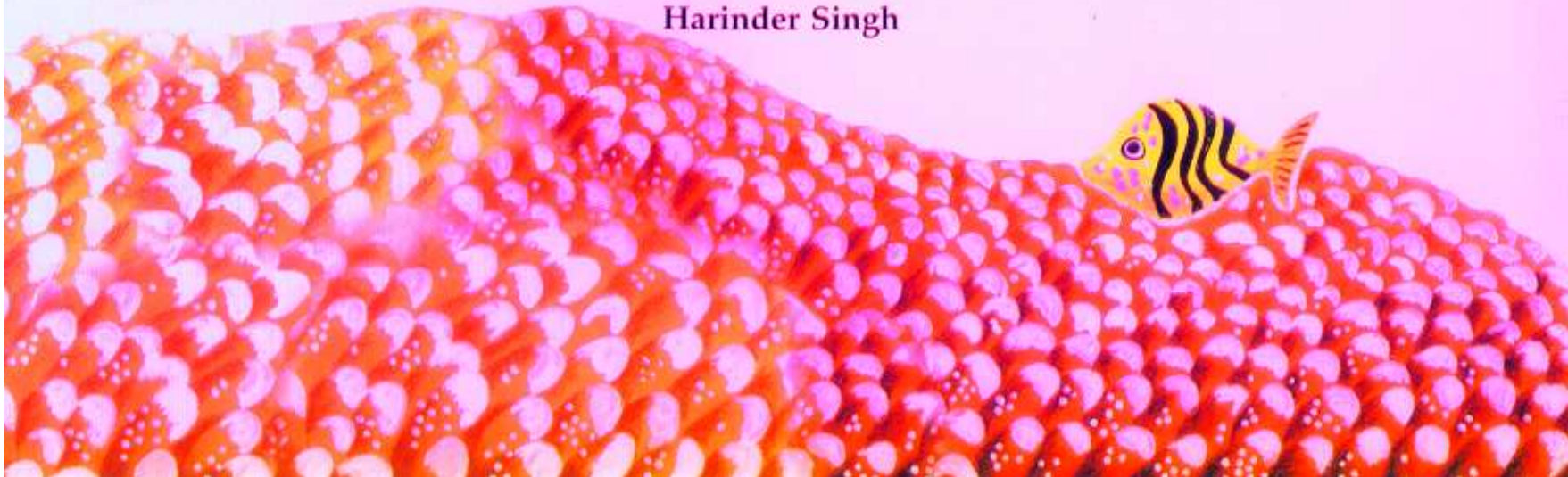
Nehru Bal Pustakalaya

The Prince and the Coral Sea

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A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

"Life is the most precious thing there is." This is a saying from Okinawa, a land that from olden times has loved life and loved peace. Even the famous Napoleon was surprised by Okinawa. "Can there really be a country that has no weapons?" he is said to have exclaimed.

In the last few hundred years, Okinawa was treated badly by countries that did have weapons. Some terrible history was made in Okinawa, land of coral, where flowers of every colour wrap you in beauty. This beautiful country has been forced to be the setting for some very sad stories.

If you read about Okinawa in history, you will find that it used to be called Ryukyu. Ryukyu or Okinawa, throughout its history the people have always lived strongly and faithfully. I want them to have the happiness that they deserve.

With the wish that the people who have suffered the most may be rewarded with the greatest possible happiness, I wrote this story about Ryo.

—Daisaku Ikeda

THE MERMAID'S GIFT

Ryo was at the beach again today, the place he liked best of all. He and the other boys were about to haul in their net, full of fish, just as they always did.

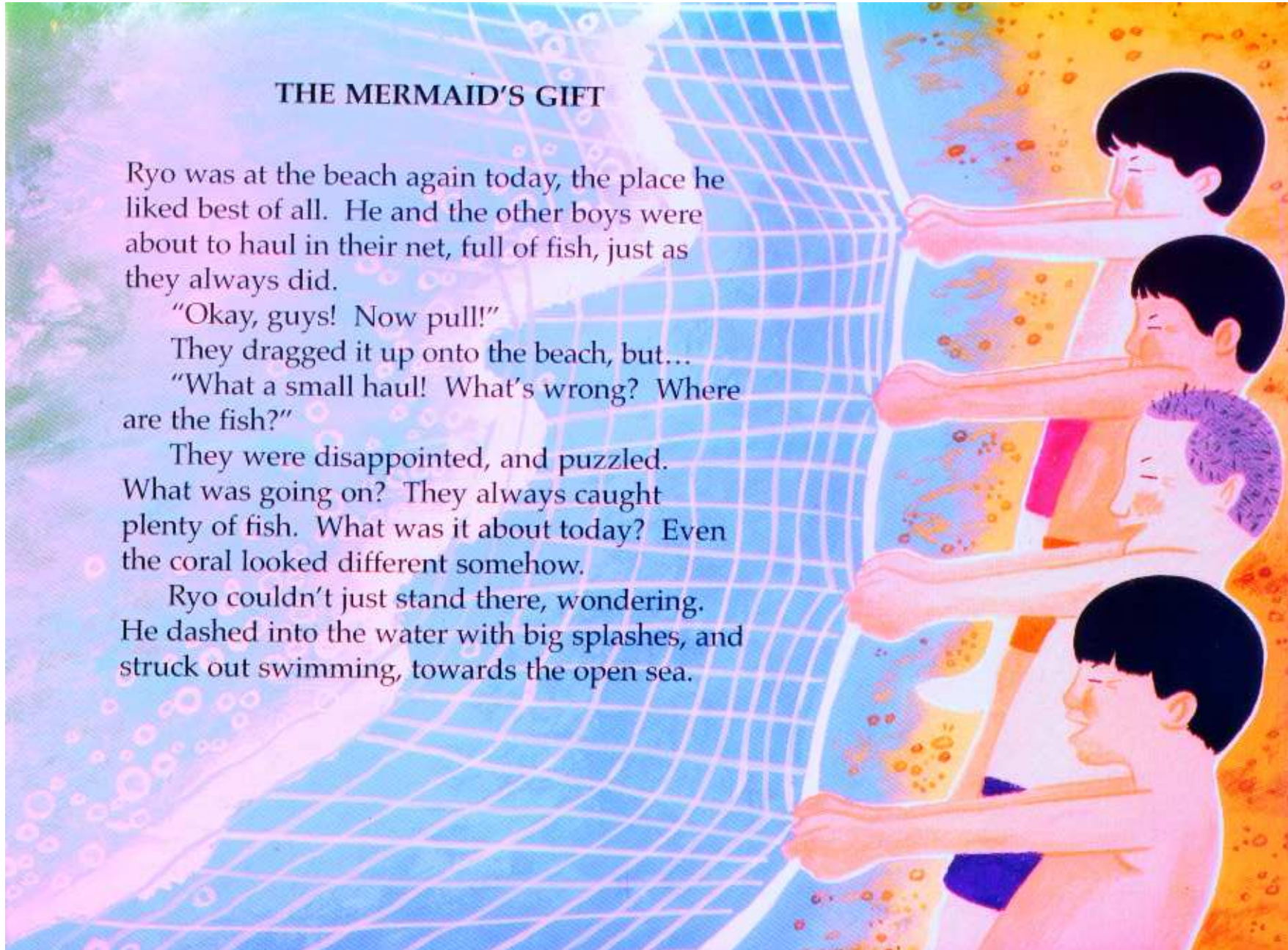
"Okay, guys! Now pull!"

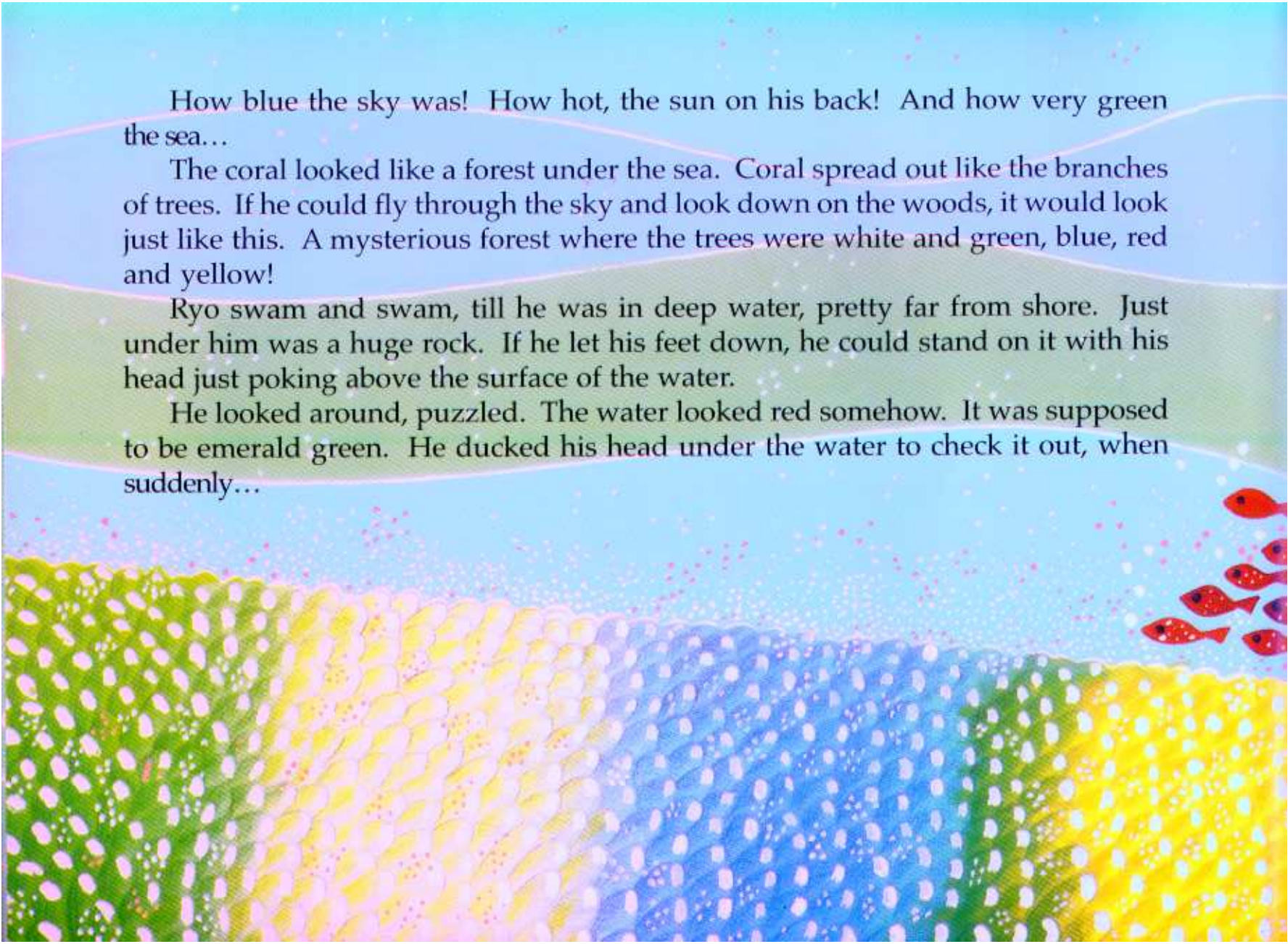
They dragged it up onto the beach, but...

"What a small haul! What's wrong? Where are the fish?"

They were disappointed, and puzzled. What was going on? They always caught plenty of fish. What was it about today? Even the coral looked different somehow.

Ryo couldn't just stand there, wondering. He dashed into the water with big splashes, and struck out swimming, towards the open sea.





How blue the sky was! How hot, the sun on his back! And how very green the sea...

The coral looked like a forest under the sea. Coral spread out like the branches of trees. If he could fly through the sky and look down on the woods, it would look just like this. A mysterious forest where the trees were white and green, blue, red and yellow!

Ryo swam and swam, till he was in deep water, pretty far from shore. Just under him was a huge rock. If he let his feet down, he could stand on it with his head just poking above the surface of the water.

He looked around, puzzled. The water looked red somehow. It was supposed to be emerald green. He ducked his head under the water to check it out, when suddenly...

Seaweed! A bunch of slippery, slimy seaweed under his foot made him slip right off the rock! He swung and splashed and tried to get his footing. In a panic, he grabbed at a branch of coral. Snap! It broke off in his hand.

"Ouch!" Something cut his leg. A shell? The rock? It hurt so much he wanted to cry.

Ryo threw his head back and let himself float, up to the water surface. He looked around for the rock he had been standing on before. Down, down, through the clear water he could see pieces of the coral he had accidentally broken off.

"I'm sorry," he wanted to apologize to the coral. "That must have hurt you, too."

Just churning his arms in the water, he could hardly swim. The gash in his leg hurt so much he couldn't kick. It was useless. Just then, he sensed something else in the water behind him. It was a peachy colour, and big. And it was swimming right at him!





The thing reached out and... took him in her arms, carrying him gently. He was saved! Saved by a mermaid, who swam towards the shore.

Like a dolphin, swiftly, smoothly she swam for both of them until they reached the shelter of a rocky beach.

"A...a...mermaid!"

"Shhh. Be still. You're bleeding." She peeled off one of her own peachy, pearly scales, and pressed the shining scale against the gash on Ryo's leg.

"Ooh, that hurts!" he would have said, but by the time he formed the words, the pain was gone, and the cut was gone too.

His cut was healed, but the mermaid? She looked so tired, and the place where she had pulled the scale from was raw and red.

"Thank you! You saved me, but look what you've done to yourself." His face was full of concern.

"Ah, but you shared the coral's pain. How could I not help a boy like you?"

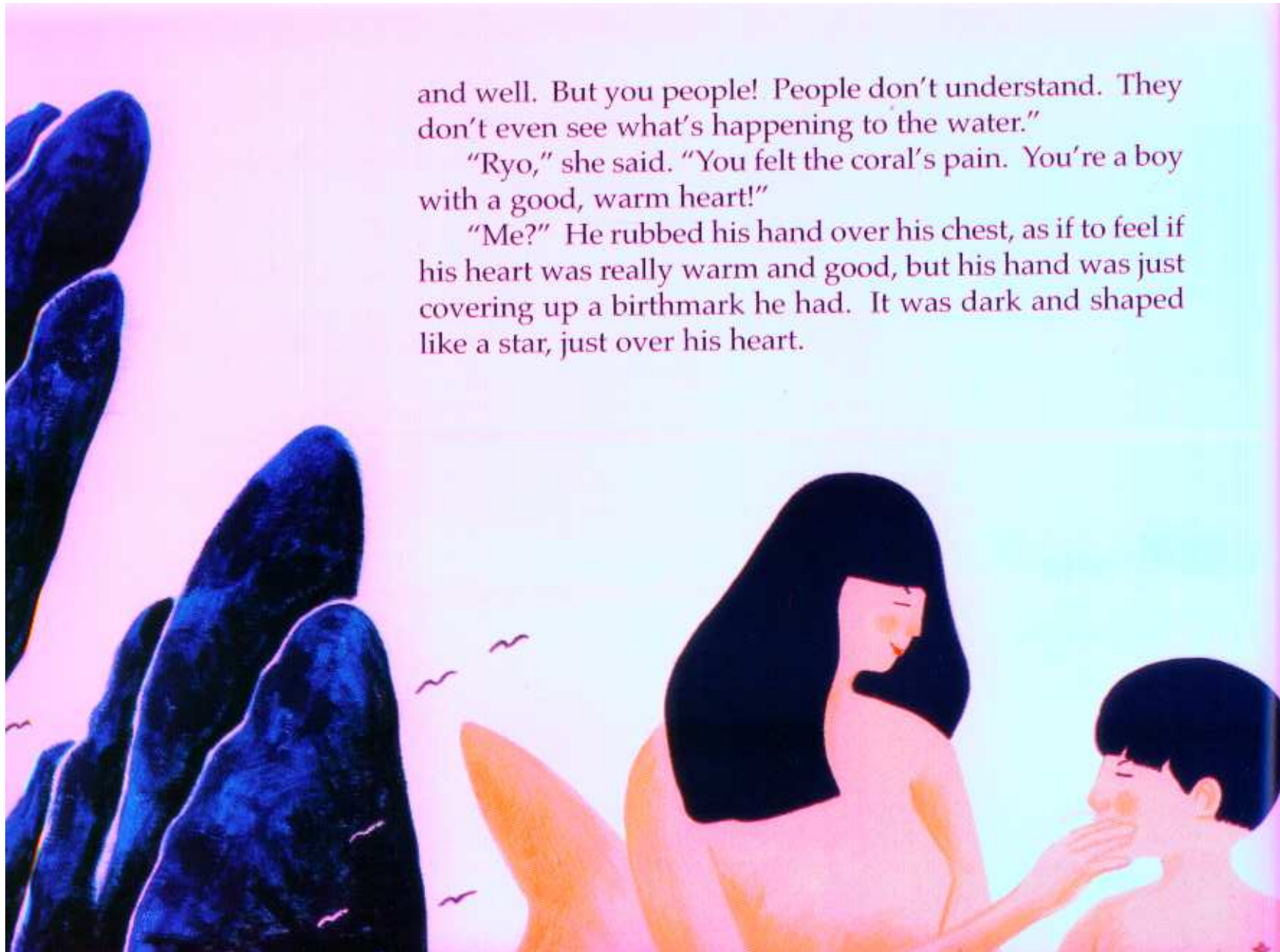
She sighed. "It's my business to look after the coral, to be sure the fish are safe

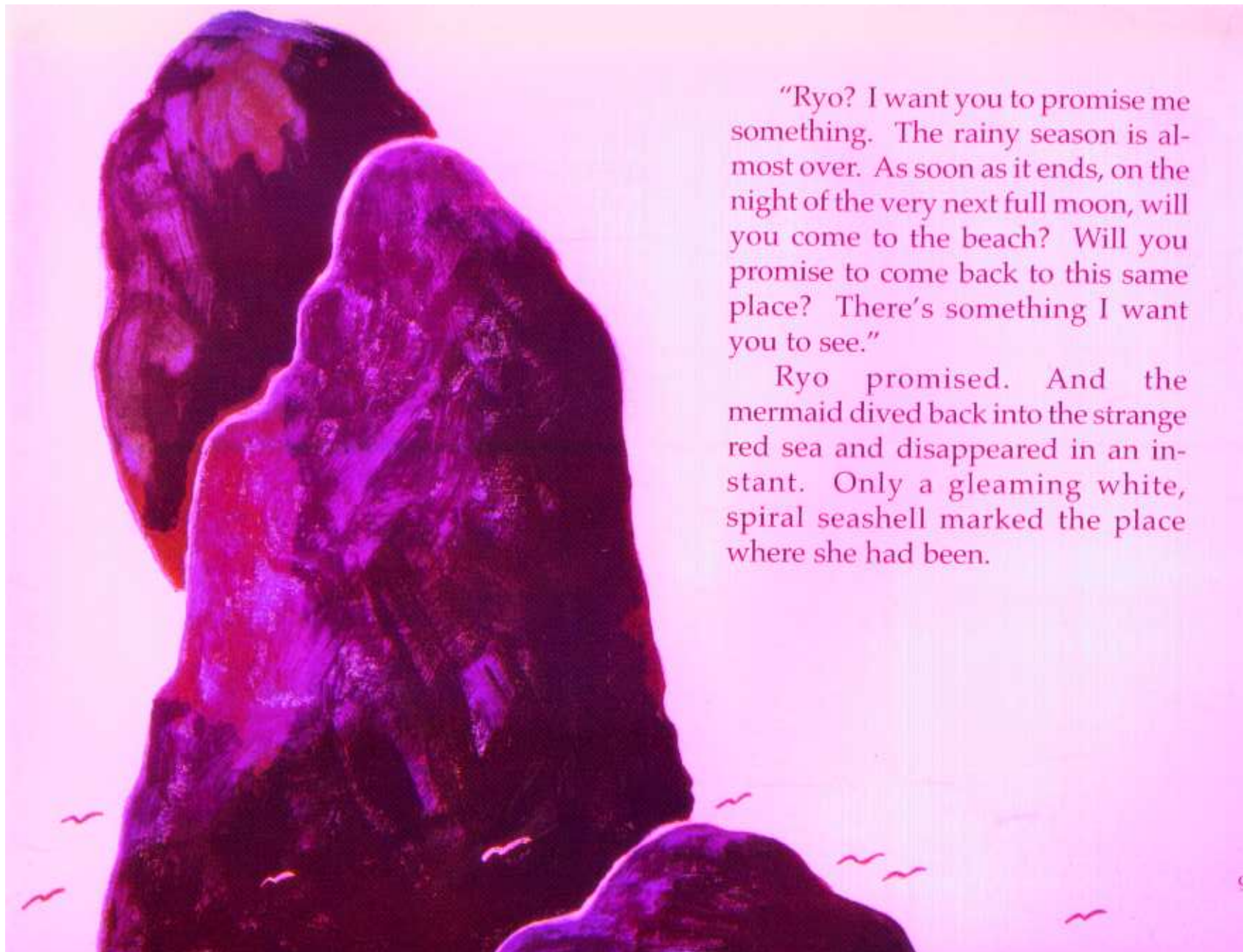


and well. But you people! People don't understand. They don't even see what's happening to the water."

"Ryo," she said. "You felt the coral's pain. You're a boy with a good, warm heart!"

"Me?" He rubbed his hand over his chest, as if to feel if his heart was really warm and good, but his hand was just covering up a birthmark he had. It was dark and shaped like a star, just over his heart.





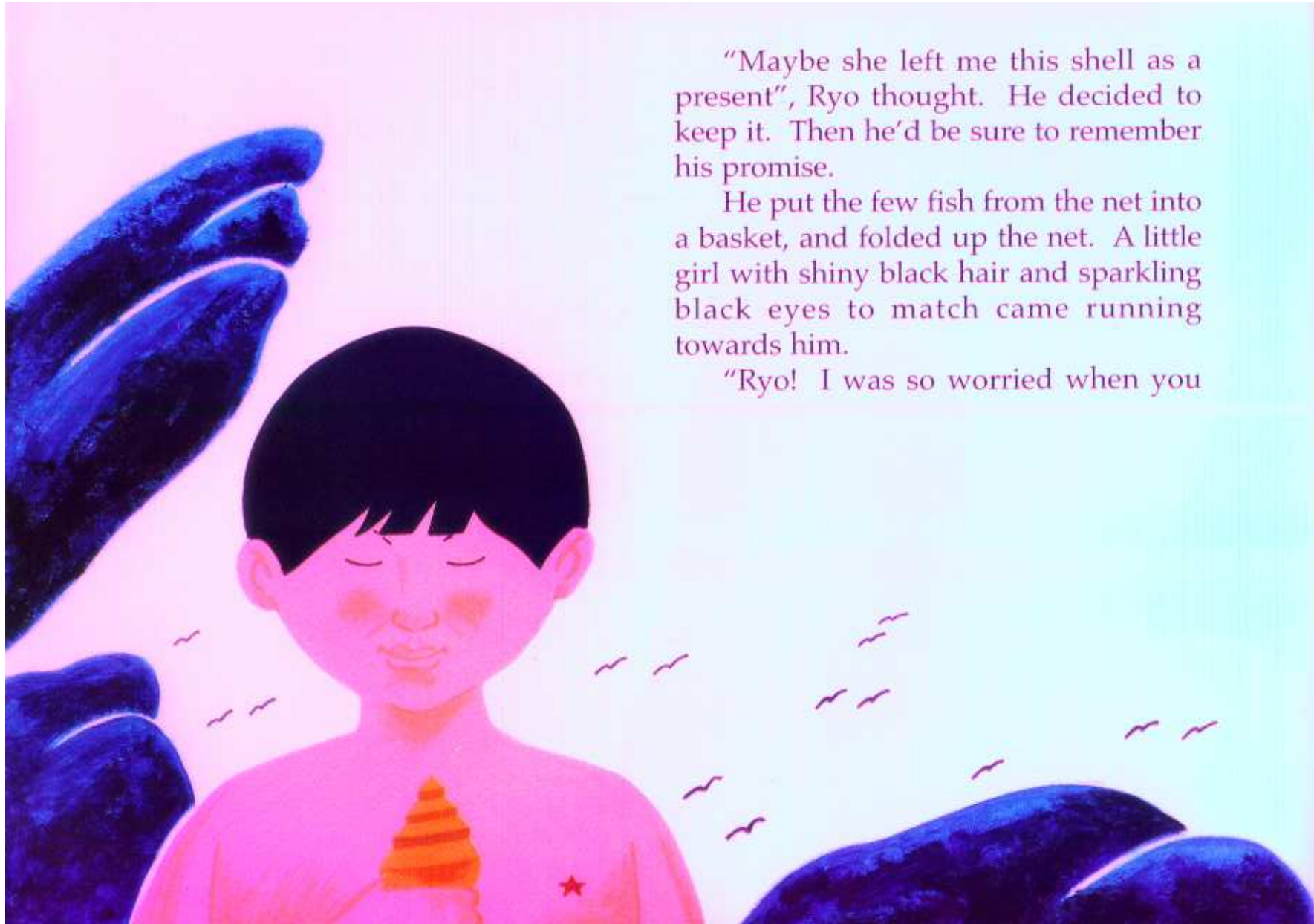
"Ryo? I want you to promise me something. The rainy season is almost over. As soon as it ends, on the night of the very next full moon, will you come to the beach? Will you promise to come back to this same place? There's something I want you to see."

Ryo promised. And the mermaid dived back into the strange red sea and disappeared in an instant. Only a gleaming white, spiral seashell marked the place where she had been.

"Maybe she left me this shell as a present", Ryo thought. He decided to keep it. Then he'd be sure to remember his promise.

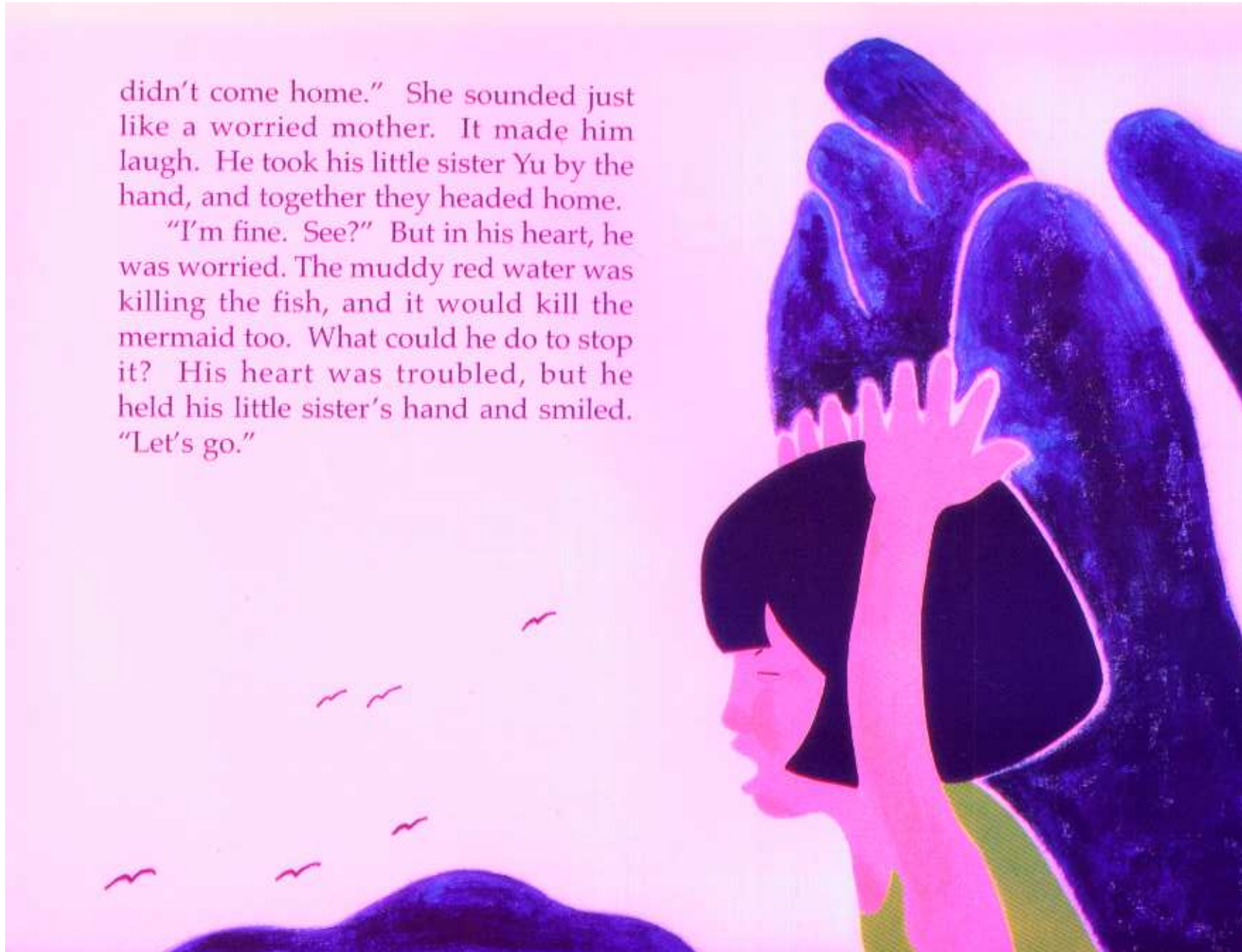
He put the few fish from the net into a basket, and folded up the net. A little girl with shiny black hair and sparkling black eyes to match came running towards him.

"Ryo! I was so worried when you



didn't come home." She sounded just like a worried mother. It made him laugh. He took his little sister Yu by the hand, and together they headed home.

"I'm fine. See?" But in his heart, he was worried. The muddy red water was killing the fish, and it would kill the mermaid too. What could he do to stop it? His heart was troubled, but he held his little sister's hand and smiled. "Let's go."





THE MYSTERIOUS SHELL

It was sundown, and Ryo was hurrying home. He had been to the mountains to pick special grasses and leaves, herbs to use as medicine for his little sister Yu. She was sick in bed with a very high fever.

"Hey, you!"

Ryo looked around. Someone was yelling at him.

"Hey, punk! Who do you think you are?"

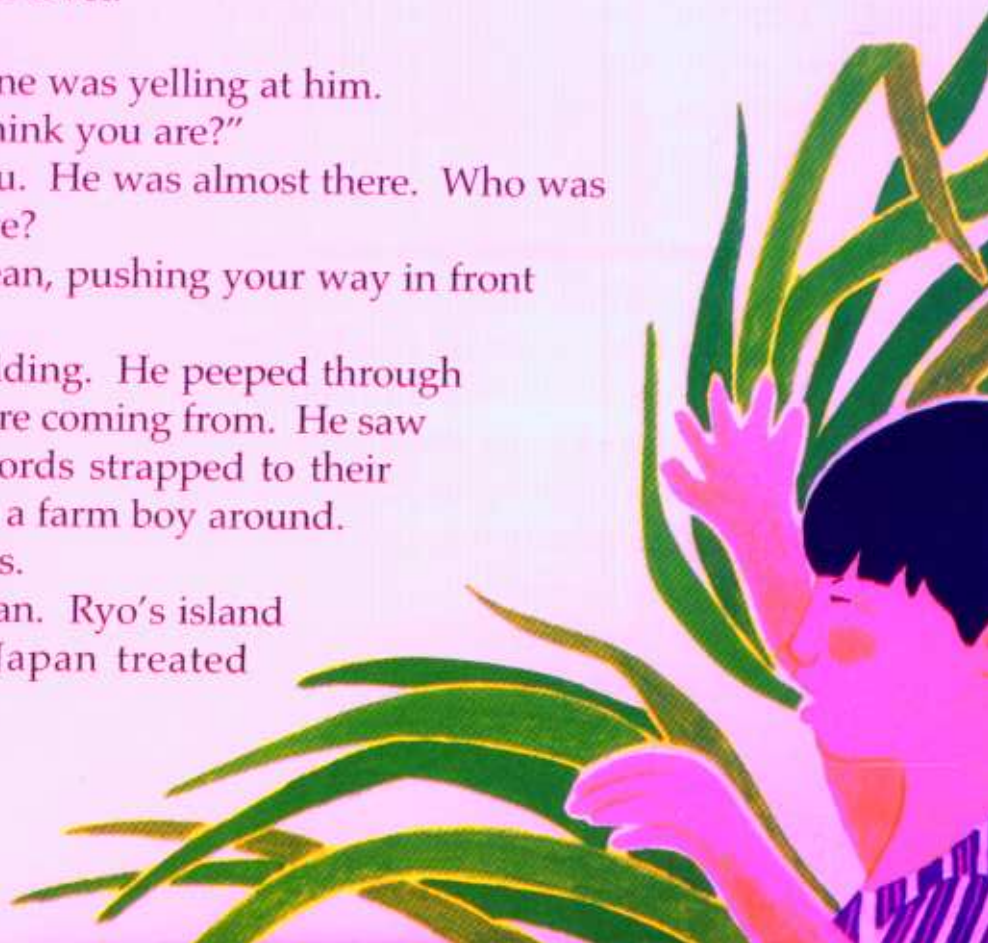
He needed to get home to Yu. He was almost there. Who was that, yelling in a big, angry voice?

"You, kid! What do you mean, pushing your way in front of Samurai like us!"

It wasn't Ryo they were scolding. He peeped through the bushes, where the voices were coming from. He saw two big men, Samurai with swords strapped to their waists. And they were pushing a farm boy around.

Samurai! This was bad news.

The Samurai came from Japan. Ryo's island was Okinawa. At that time, Japan treated Okinawans like slaves.



The farm boy was Ryo's cousin, Kei. One of the Samurai gave him a slap that knocked Kei to his knees.

"I'm sorry!" he pleaded. "I needed to get the doctor, and I was in a hurry, and..."

Ryo and his little sister lived with their uncle and Kei. One day, Ryo's parents had been down at the beach, when a huge wave washed over the beach. His parents—and a thousand other people—had all been washed away.

Well, he called them his parents, but they weren't, really. They were the people who found him, when he was lost and sick, alone in the mountains. They took him into their house and treated him like their own child.

Yu was just a baby then. "Look," they told everyone in the village. "First Yu is born, and then her big brother!" It was their own special joke.

"Punk!" screamed one of the Samurai, drawing his sword. "Say your last words and get ready to die!"

Ryo had to do something. He slipped off the basket of herbs strapped to his back. He meant to be quiet, but he forgot that he also had the mermaid's seashell





dangling from his belt. The basket hit the seashell with a tinkling sound, and a good thing that it did.

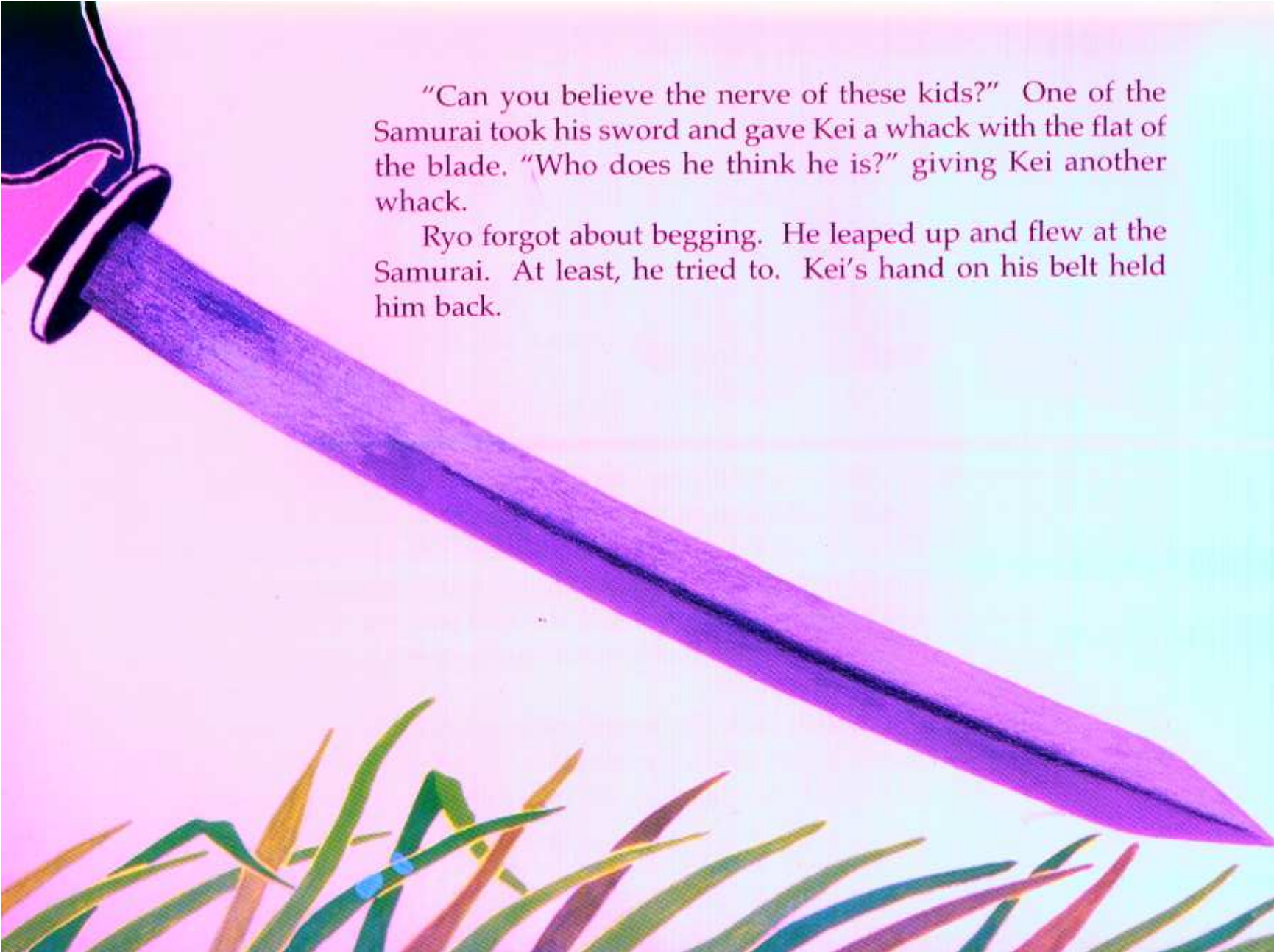
Should he run away? Stand and fight? He didn't know what to do. Then the sound of the shell made him think of the mermaid and her words. "You have a big heart." A boy with a big heart would not run away.

Ryo found himself running, right towards the two Samurai.

"Let him go! You let my cousin go! He's not hurting you! Leave him alone. He has to get the doctor for my sister!"

Ryo threw himself at their feet. He spoke more calmly.

"Please, sir. If someone in your family needed a doctor, wouldn't you hurry too? Please, sir." He looked them each in the eye. "Please! Let my cousin go."



"Can you believe the nerve of these kids?" One of the Samurai took his sword and gave Kei a whack with the flat of the blade. "Who does he think he is?" giving Kei another whack.

Ryo forgot about begging. He leaped up and flew at the Samurai. At least, he tried to. Kei's hand on his belt held him back.

"Cut it out, Ryo. We can't do anything except just take it. They're bigger, and they both have swords."

"Come on", said the other Samurai. "Let's go."

Turning to Kei and Ryo, he growled, "You're lucky this time."

As soon as the men were out of sight, Ryo jumped up. "Kei, are you all right?" Kei's face was so pale it was almost green. Ryo felt Kei's back for blood.

Kei was doubled over. He couldn't get up. Then Ryo noticed something very strange. He still had the mermaid's seashell in his hand, and his hand was starting to sting. Not just his hand! His whole body started to ache, as if it were he and not Kei who had just been beaten up.

"Ryo!" said Kei. "I'm OK. It's funny, but I don't feel a thing anymore."

Ryo croaked, "That's good," and tried to smile. But he himself could barely breathe.



A PIECE OF YOUR LIFE

Kei brought the doctor back from the village. Ryo's aunt and uncle were sitting beside his little sister Yu's bed. They were all worried. His uncle broke the silence. "Well, doctor, can you cure her?"

The doctor lowered his voice, so Yu wouldn't hear. "Her fever is much too high. This is good medicine, and if she takes it for the next three days.... But I'm not sure she can hold on even until tomorrow."

Ryo's aunt rubbed at the tears in her eyes with a corner of her sleeve. Only the stove sputtered in the corner. Everyone was still and silent. After the doctor was gone, Yu opened her eyes and said in a tiny voice, "Ryo? Am I going to die?"

"N... No. You're going to take this really good medicine that the doctor brought and get well."

"Ryo? If I die, then what? Do I go down into the sea? Or up into the sky?"

"Die? You're not going to die. You're going to stay right here with me."

"Ryo? If I die, can I see Mom and Dad again?"

"You are not going to die. You're going to get well, and we'll play on the beach and..."

"I don't want to die. I want to stay here with you."

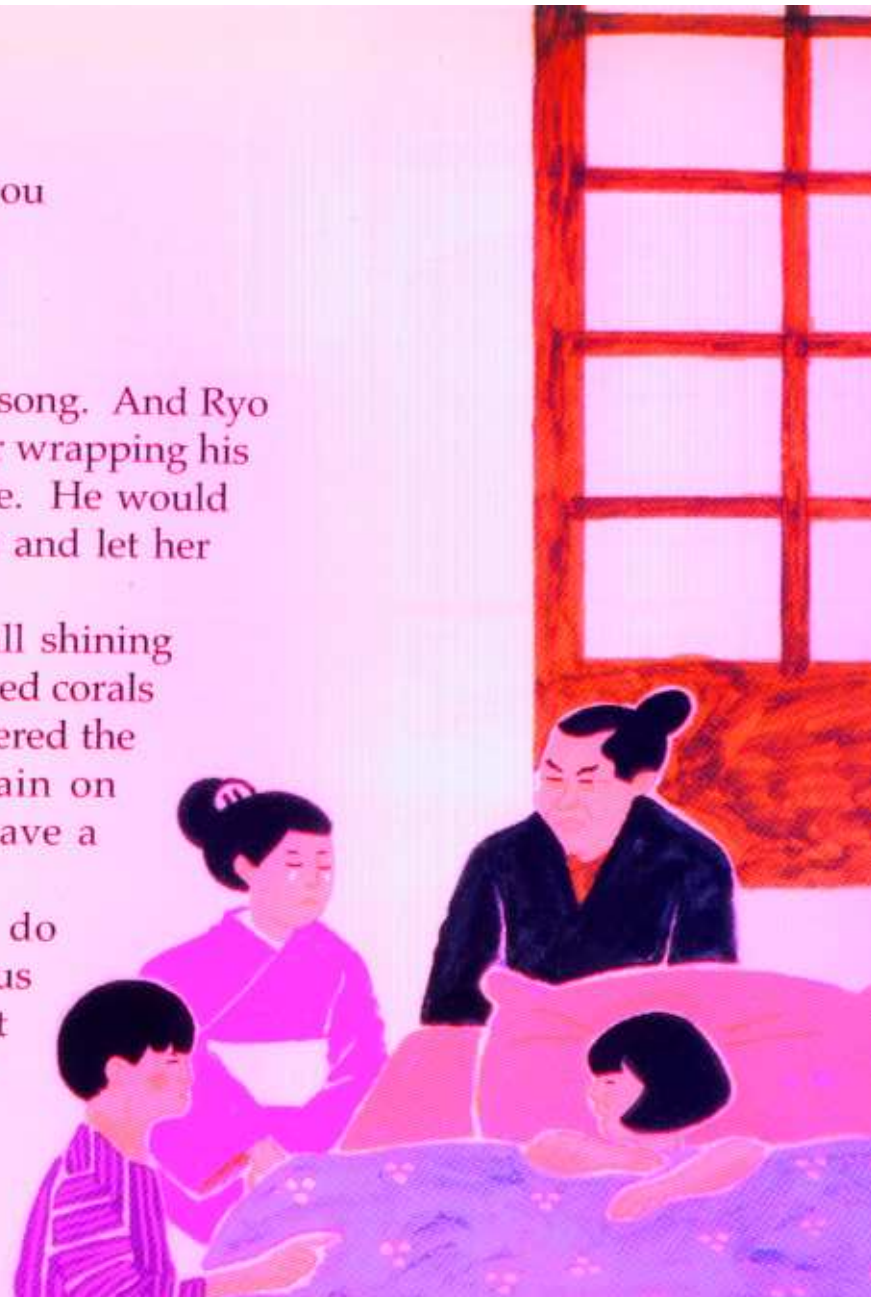
Ryo couldn't stand it anymore. He ran outside, and stood under the stars, looking up, trying not to cry. He could hear his aunt singing a lullaby to Yu.

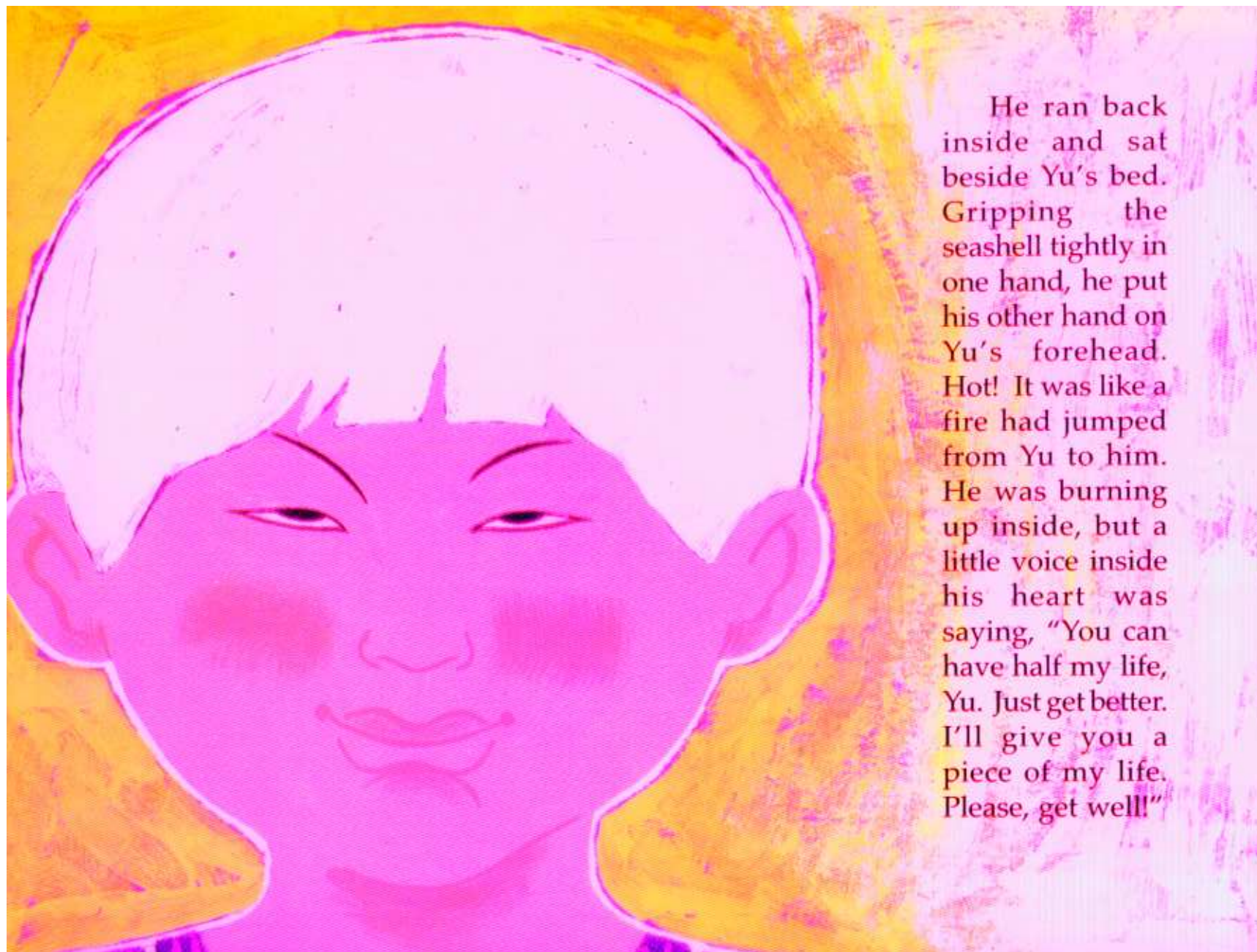
"I am the star
the star that watches over you
I am the star
that wraps you in starlight
and keeps you safe..."

It was a traditional Ryukyu island song. And Ryo would have given anything to be a star wrapping his baby sister in starlight to keep her safe. He would gladly trade places, to be the sick one and let her get well.

White stars, red stars, blue stars all shining down on him, twinkling like the coloured corals in the dark sea. Coral... . He remembered the mermaid, how she took his own pain on herself and made him better. "You have a good heart," she told him.

A good heart! Maybe he could do something for Yu. Something mysterious happened with him and Kei, maybe it would work again for Yu with the help of that seashell.





He ran back inside and sat beside Yu's bed. Gripping the seashell tightly in one hand, he put his other hand on Yu's forehead. Hot! It was like a fire had jumped from Yu to him. He was burning up inside, but a little voice inside his heart was saying, "You can have half my life, Yu. Just get better. I'll give you a piece of my life. Please, get well!"

It didn't take long at all. Yu opened her eyes, surprised. "I feel better," she said softly. She sat up in bed. "Yes," she said in a bright, strong voice. "I feel fine now." And she laughed. "I feel good enough to go out and play!"

They looked at each other with big happy smiles, and Yu said, "Ryo! What's wrong with your hair?"

"What do you mean? What's wrong with my hair?"

"It's white! You look like an old man."



BIG STARS AND LITTLE STARS

The rainy season was over, and tonight was the night of the full moon. It was time for Ryo to keep his promise and see the mermaid one more time. He ran down to the beach.

She was there, her face sparkling above the waves.

"Ryo!" she called, "You're really here!" She smiled at him, and then worry filled her voice. "But what happened to you? You look so old!"

He told her everything that happened, about the two Samurai and Kei, and about Yu's fever. He even told her about promising to give a piece of his life to Yu if only she would get better.

"I knew it! You do have a good heart. You saved them, and Kei and Yu aren't even your own family. Ryo, you are really..."

"Never mind", he cut her off. "I like them. I love them the same as if they were my real family. Even the other people on the island—they're all my people. It's just as if we all had the same mother." Then he remembered his manners.

"Thank you for the shell," he told her. He had it in his hand, and was glad.

"That shell," she said, "Is not any old ordinary shell, you know. That shell is a chip that flew off a star. A giant star, too."

Ryo looked a little puzzled.

"Stars have life, too," she said. "There's nothing in the universe that doesn't



have a life. And life comes to an end. Even the long, long life of a star."

Ryo was listening, but he didn't understand.

"When the end comes for a giant star, they go out with a big bang. Chips and stardust fly everywhere."

Ryo was still listening.

"Some of it goes to make new stars, some of it ends up in mountains or in the seas on the earth. All of it goes somewhere to make something new. You! Me! The coral in the sea!"

"Stars are like our mothers!" Ryo blurted out. "That's what you're saying!" And he felt very pleased about it. He always felt as if everything in the world was just one, big family.

"Well," she said, and gave a little sniff. "That's what giant stars are like. On the other hand,..." She looked to see if Ryo was still listening.

"On the other hand?" he prodded.

"Well," she said. "There are dwarf stars, too. And they die, too. But they do it differently. Dwarf stars just get smaller. They don't give pieces of themselves to make anything new. They get smaller and smaller and smaller. They are really selfish creatures."

Ryo could tell she didn't think much of little dwarf stars.

"They are all wrapped up in themselves while they are alive. And when the end comes for a dwarf star, they get even more wrapped up in themselves. They pull in all their light, and get smaller and smaller until there's nothing left but a dark, black hole where they used to be."

She sighed. Ryo guessed what was coming next.

"Don't you think people are a lot like stars? The ones with giant-sized hearts think of others, the ones with tiny, stingy little hearts don't."

Ryo held out his seashell that came from a chip off a giant star. "I used it," he said. "I used the giant star's power when I helped Kei and Yu."

"Yes, you did." She nodded thoughtfully. "But Ryo, you have to promise me one thing."

"Sure," he said.

"You can't use it again. Not even once. It only works for people with kind and generous hearts, the kind of person who would give up his own life to save someone he loves."

Ryo looked down at the shell in his hand.

"Look at me, Ryo. You need to understand that if you use it, then you yourself will die."

Everything was quiet except for the waves. They splashed against the sand, and fell back into the sea. Up to the beach, back to the sea, over and over and over again.

Ryo tried to say what he was thinking. "Before I came here, before my mother came here, before... Well, even before any of us were born, the sea was already here, coming and going, going and coming. Waves like these... Sand just like this..."

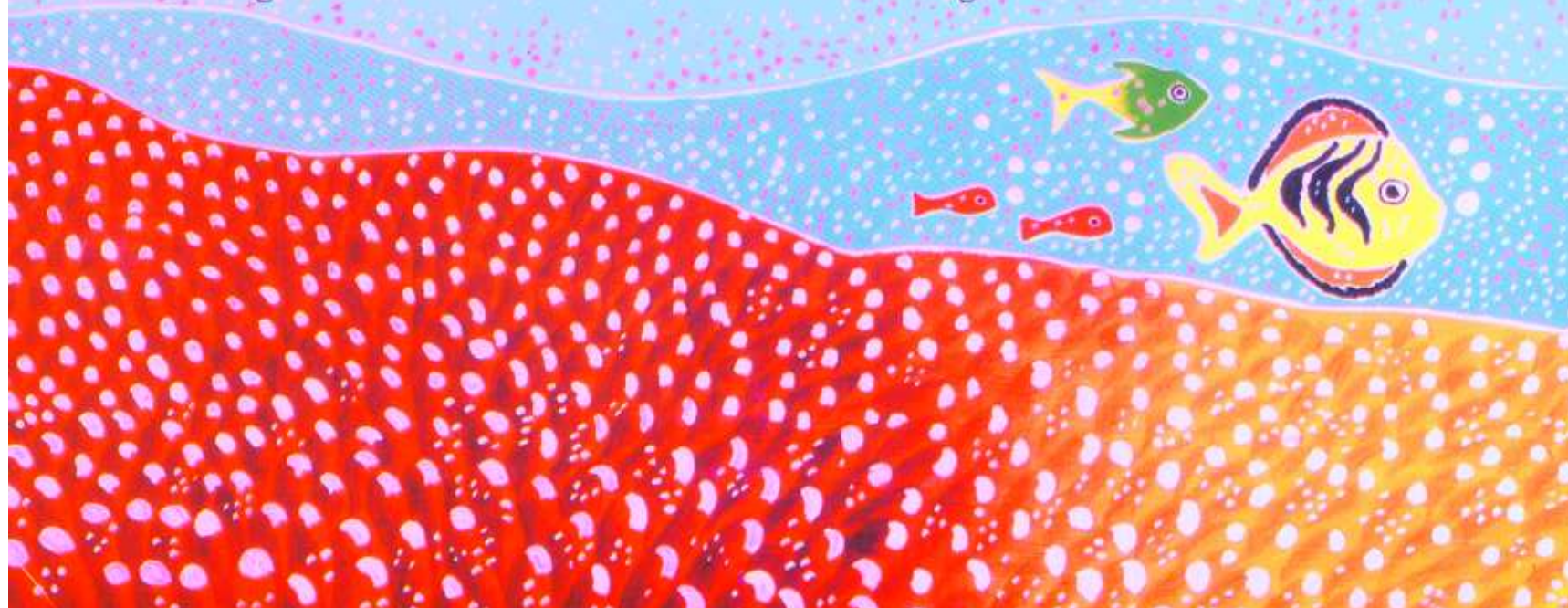
The light from the full moon was making a path on the sea. The splashing of the waves made it sparkle. The moonlight on the water jumped around as if it were alive.

"It is alive", he thought. "Everything, even the moon and the water, is alive."

"Come with me, Ryo. This is what I wanted to show you." And the mermaid took his hand, and swam with him in the dark water. It wasn't cold, and it wasn't scary. But only because he held the mermaid's hand.

He could see the coral under the water. That's how bright the moonlight was. But the coral looked... It looked... It looked fizzy. Bubbles and foam were floating around every branch of coral.

"You see? This is the night... Well, it's just as if all the coral got together and talked it over and came to the same decision. On the night of the biggest, brightest, fullest moon of summer, they all throw their eggs into the sea, and the sea helps them to grow into new coral. That's what the fizzing is all about"



"Eggs! You mean the coral are alive?"

"Of course they're alive. And Ryo, there's something you can do for them."
And just as if she herself was one of the coral family, the mermaid started to explain to Ryo.



ORDERS FROM THE KING

The next morning, wherever he went, everywhere in the village, people were busy. Ryo's uncle, too, was getting ready to go.

"We all have orders from the king. We have to go up the mountain to cut wood." He looked at Ryo. "I'm going. Kei is going. Can I count on you to take care of the farm while we are gone?"

Ryo wondered out loud why everyone had to go off and cut wood. His uncle explained that the king wanted the wood for a big, fancy new building. He was making a palace for the Samurai.

"Last night..." Was it OK to tell? "Last night, I saw a mermaid."

"Mermaid!"

"She told me about the coral. She said that muddy water was killing the coral." Ryo went on, "If we cut down the trees, then the red soil washes into the sea. Every time it rains, mud washes into the river and then into the sea. And now, the coral are dying because of that. And when the coral die, the fish won't be able to live there anymore, either."

"I hear you, Ryo. There's an old saying, 'Cut the trees and you kill the fish'." He wiped his face. The sun was making him burn. Ryo could see he looked worried.



"That's not all", Ryo said. "The coral break up the waves. When a big wave comes, it has to go through the coral first. The coral keeps us safe."

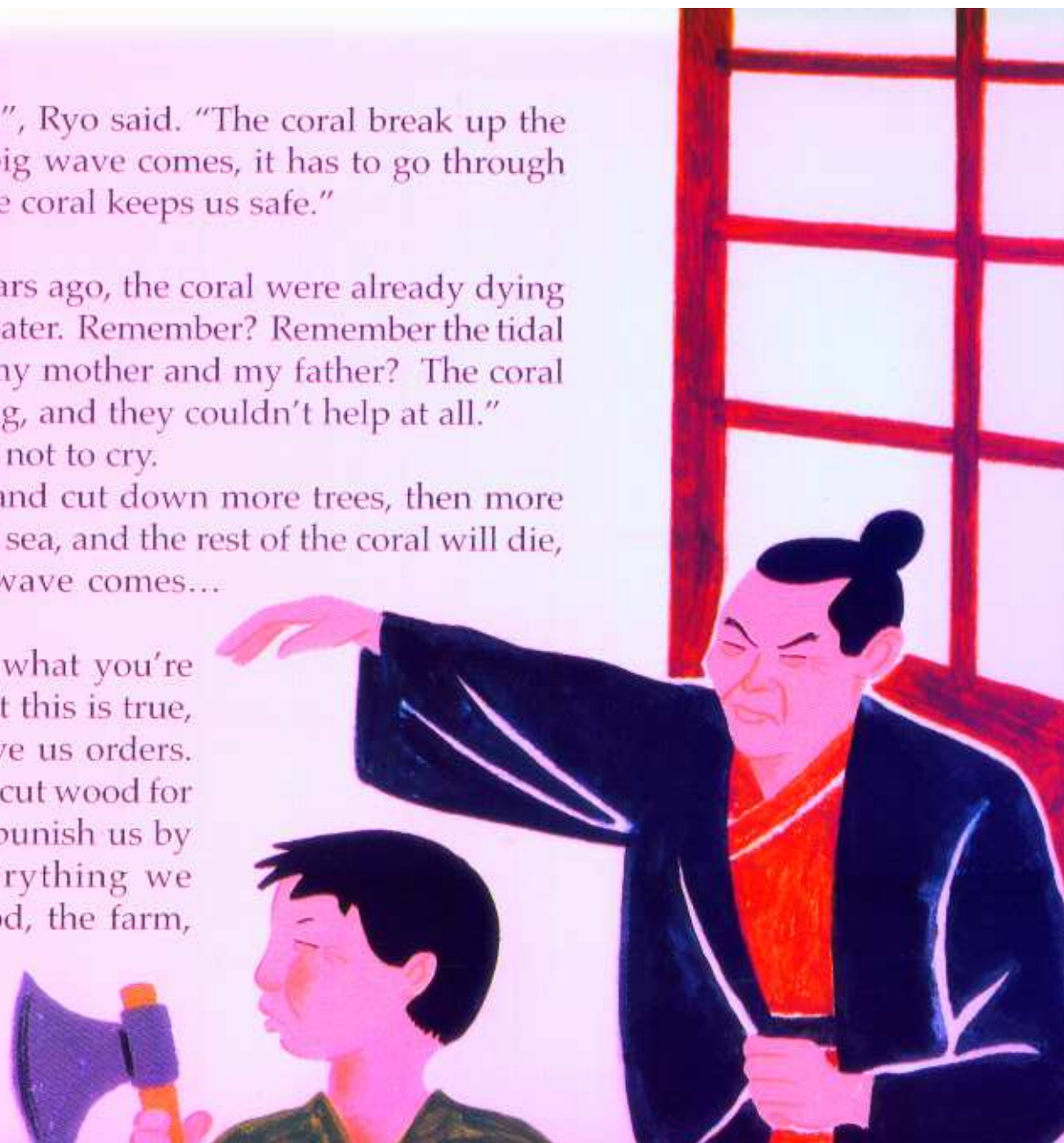
"I know."

"Just a few years ago, the coral were already dying from the muddy water. Remember? Remember the tidal wave that killed my mother and my father? The coral were already dying, and they couldn't help at all."

He was trying not to cry.

"So, if we go and cut down more trees, then more soil will fill up the sea, and the rest of the coral will die, and when a big wave comes... Then what?"

"Ryo, I know what you're saying is true. But this is true, too. The king gave us orders. If we don't go and cut wood for him, then he can punish us by taking away everything we have. All our food, the farm,



everything. With no food, no house, no farm, how can we live?"

Ryo didn't know what to say. But he went around to everyone in the village. He begged them not to go up the mountain and cut down trees. Everyone he talked to said the same thing. They sounded just like his uncle.

"Ryo, you don't understand. That's how things work in the real world."

There was one thing Ryo understood very well. Whether they cut the trees or refused to cut the trees, it would be bad for them. They were sure to suffer either way.

Cutting down trees was hard work, and after the trees were cut, the logs had to be carried all the way to the castle. On top of the chopping and sawing and dragging and carrying, they had to hurry. Hurry, hurry!

And then it happened. First Ryo's uncle got hurt, then Kei. One broke an arm; the other broke a leg. The villagers had to carry Kei back to the house because of his broken leg. Neither of them



could work. They couldn't work in the mountains, and they couldn't work on the farm.

Ryo made up his mind. He would do it, one more time. He would use the shell, the mermaid's wonderful shell. It took away his sister's fever. It would work for his uncle and cousin, too.

Ryo was going to give them a hand, and a leg, too. His own arm, his own leg! He held the seashell tightly, and sure enough, the broken arm and the broken leg got better right away. His uncle and cousin were fine, but as for Ryo himself... his arm felt suddenly stiff. It was hard to move his leg. "She tried to tell me," he thought. "The mermaid told me not to use the shell again."

"But," he told himself, "It was the only thing I could do." And he smiled a big, happy smile.

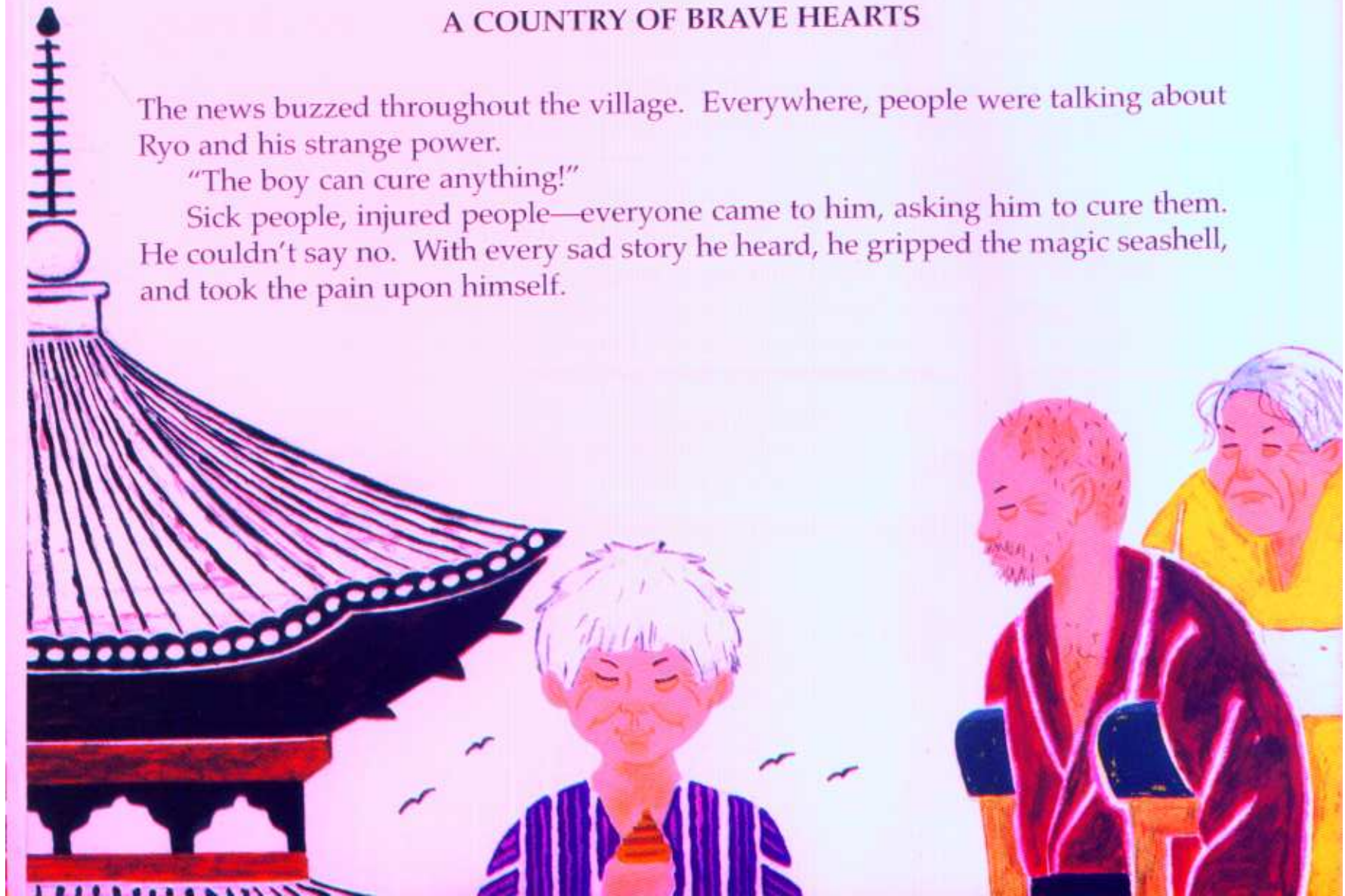


A COUNTRY OF BRAVE HEARTS

The news buzzed throughout the village. Everywhere, people were talking about Ryo and his strange power.

"The boy can cure anything!"

Sick people, injured people—everyone came to him, asking him to cure them. He couldn't say no. With every sad story he heard, he gripped the magic seashell, and took the pain upon himself.



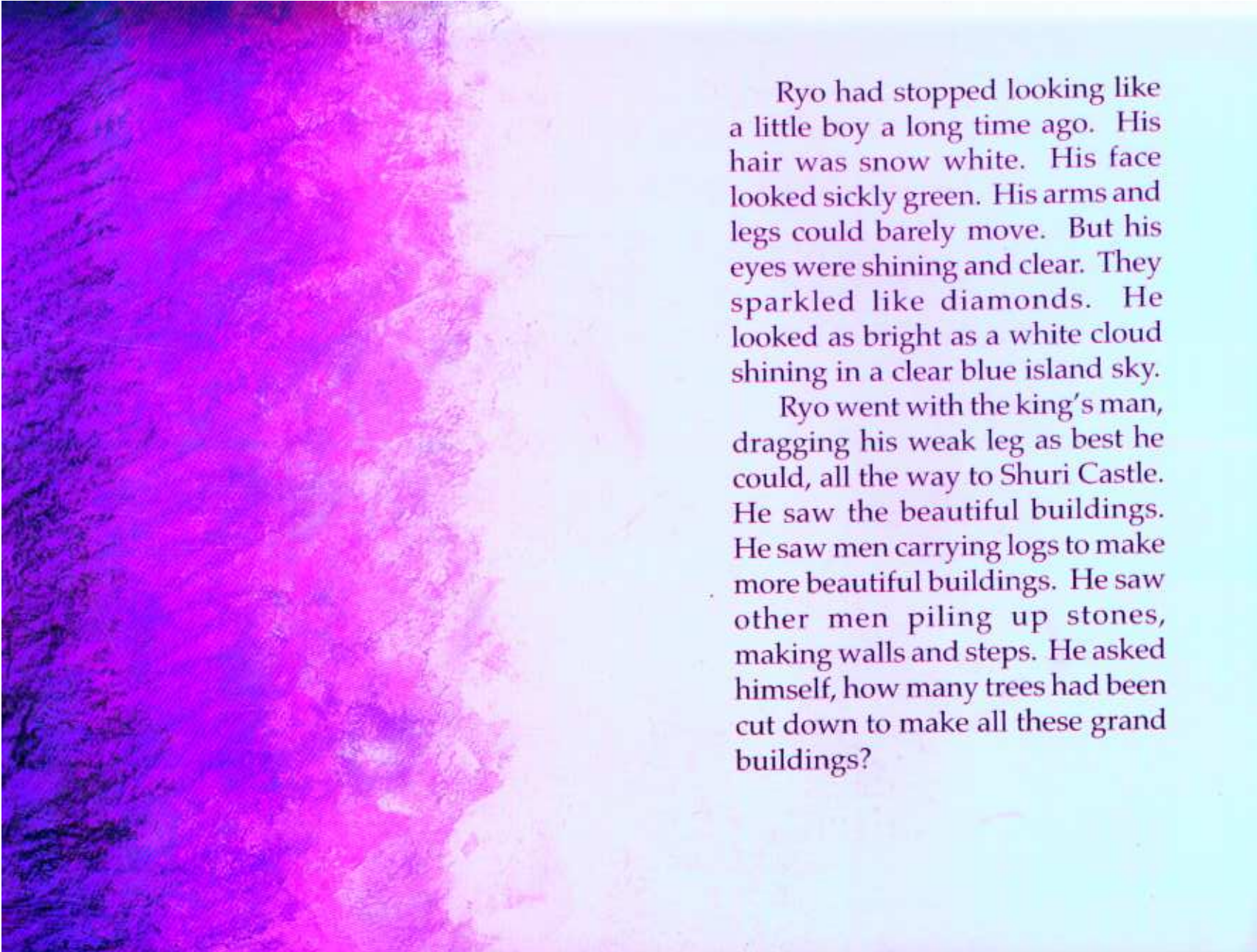
He could barely move, he could hardly breathe. But he was happy. Each person that he made well smiled with joy. To change tears into smiles made Ryo happy, too.

It wasn't long before the king himself heard about Ryo. He sent one of his men to Ryo's house.

"Come with me. The king wants to see you."

"And I want to see the king. I have something to tell him!" Ryo was eager to go to the castle. He would tell the king to stop ordering the people to cut down the trees.





Ryo had stopped looking like a little boy a long time ago. His hair was snow white. His face looked sickly green. His arms and legs could barely move. But his eyes were shining and clear. They sparkled like diamonds. He looked as bright as a white cloud shining in a clear blue island sky.

Ryo went with the king's man, dragging his weak leg as best he could, all the way to Shuri Castle. He saw the beautiful buildings. He saw men carrying logs to make more beautiful buildings. He saw other men piling up stones, making walls and steps. He asked himself, how many trees had been cut down to make all these grand buildings?



And then he saw the king.

"So you are the boy who can cure everything! I want you to cure someone for me." A little girl was with him. She was the king's daughter, and sickness had made her blind in one eye.

"Can you cure her? Can you make her see again?"

The king smiled at the thought of his daughter's good luck. Ryo would make her well again!

"If you cure her, I will reward you with anything that you want."

"Anything?"

"Anything. I promise. Just make her well."

Just like always, Ryo gave up part of himself in order to make someone else happy. The little girl was cured, but Ryo himself lost the use of his left eye.

"You did it, Ryo. Now I will keep my promise. Tell me what you want." The king looked so happy. His little girl was all smiles.

"I don't want a thing," Ryo replied. "What I want is not a thing. I want you to give an order. I want you to tell the people to stop cutting down our trees."

"Why is that, Ryo?" the king asked.

Ryo told him about how the trees held back the soil, so it wouldn't wash into the rivers and into the sea. He told the king about the coral, and how the coral stopped



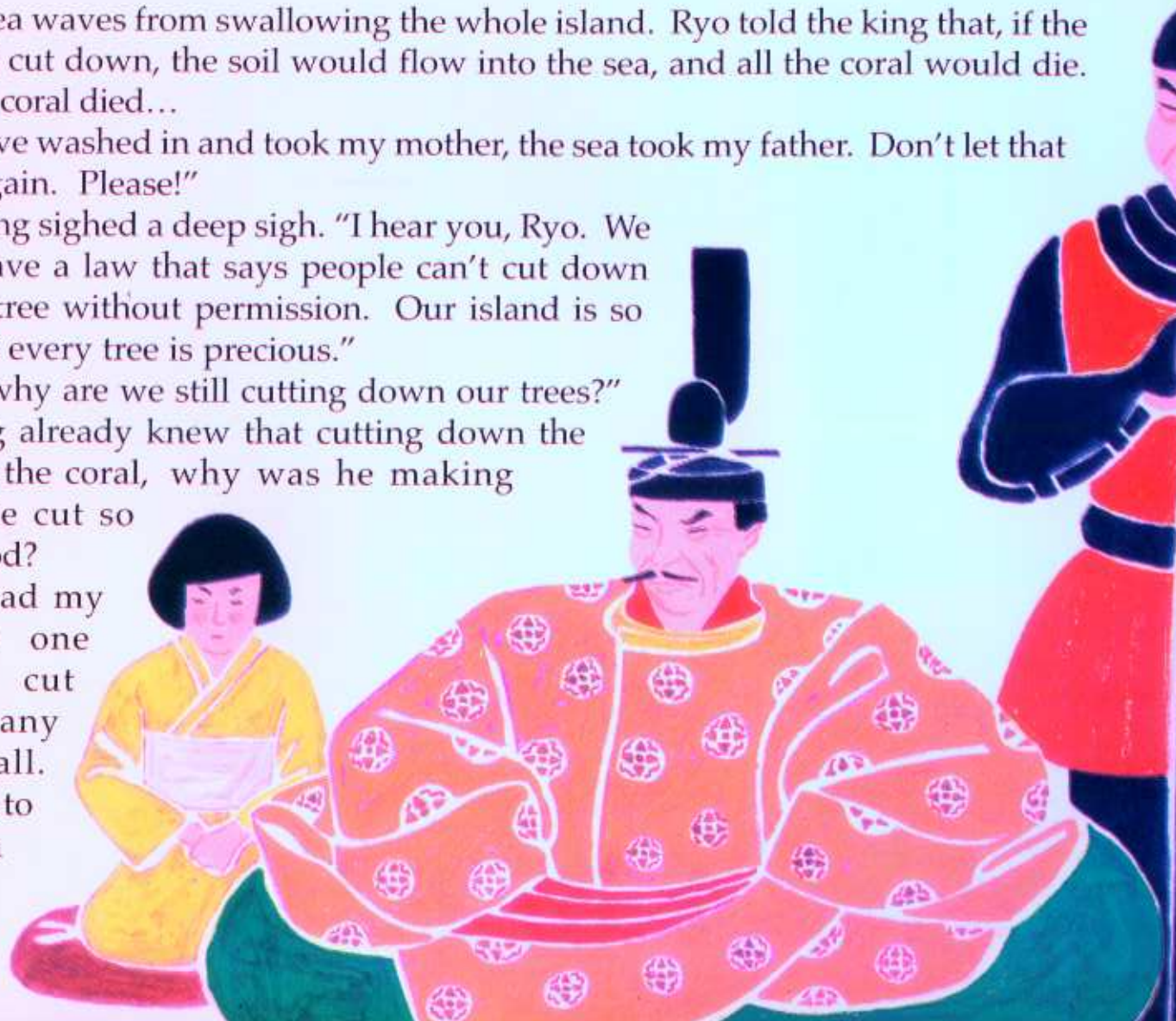
the wild sea waves from swallowing the whole island. Ryo told the king that, if the trees were cut down, the soil would flow into the sea, and all the coral would die. And if the coral died...

"A wave washed in and took my mother, the sea took my father. Don't let that happen again. Please!"

The king sighed a deep sigh. "I hear you, Ryo. We already have a law that says people can't cut down even one tree without permission. Our island is so small, and every tree is precious."

"But, why are we still cutting down our trees?"
If the king already knew that cutting down the trees kills the coral, why was he making the people cut so much wood?

"If I had my way, no one would cut down any trees at all. But I have to ask them



to do what I don't want them to do. Because those are my orders from the Samurai."

Ryo looked doubtful.

"That's the truth, Ryo. I know how hard the people work. I know how much tax money they have to pay. I know they work from sun up to sun down."

He sighed again. "I know, too, that when the people are ordered to go into the mountains to cut down trees, they cannot work on their farms. It hurts me as much as it hurts you."

The king turned and looked out the window. He seemed to be looking at something far away.

"Our fathers, and our fathers' fathers...They all wanted peace. We gave up war. We chose peace. We did what no other country could do. It was a fine thing to do. Then Samurai came, and they were stronger. They didn't understand peace."

Ryo could see that the king meant every word he said.

"Just because we don't fight with others, it doesn't mean we have to lose," said Ryo. "What you believe in your heart is what counts. At least, that's what the mermaid told me. 'A kind heart is worth more than anything.' That's what she told me."

Ryo said, "We don't have guns. We don't use swords. We have kindness, and love, and peace instead. That makes us the best, doesn't it?"

The king had nothing to say.

"Well, maybe you can't make anything out of kind and loving thoughts alone," Ryo persisted, "But without kindness, does anything else matter?"

Ryo's eyes, even the newly blind one, filled with tears. The king held back his own tears. He was thinking of another little boy. "My son, the son that I lost. If you were still alive, you would be the same age as this boy here. Would you think the same way? Would you know what to say?"

The king told Ryo about his own little boy, Ken-Ryo, who was lost, a little boy who disappeared just as if the heavens had swallowed him whole.

Then Ryo took a step closer to the king. He surprised the king by folding back his robe and showing him the star-shaped birthmark. "Father! I am Ken-Ryo. I left this place to see how real people lived. I wanted to know how it was to work and play with friends, just like everyone else."



The king was speechless.

"It was my own idea to go out by myself. I wanted to meet the people. I wanted to make friends with everyone. I see now that it made you sad. I'm sorry for that, but I'm not sorry about what I learned."

"Ryo. Ken-Ryo! It's really you!" The king reached out to his son.

"Father, I learned what the people really think. I know what they are feeling. I understand how it is to work and cry and love and laugh, all together as a family. Isn't that a king's business? To know the people?"

The king was too surprised to say a thing.

"Father, tell them to stop. Tell them to stop cutting down the trees."

"Ryo—Ken-Ryo—I can't."

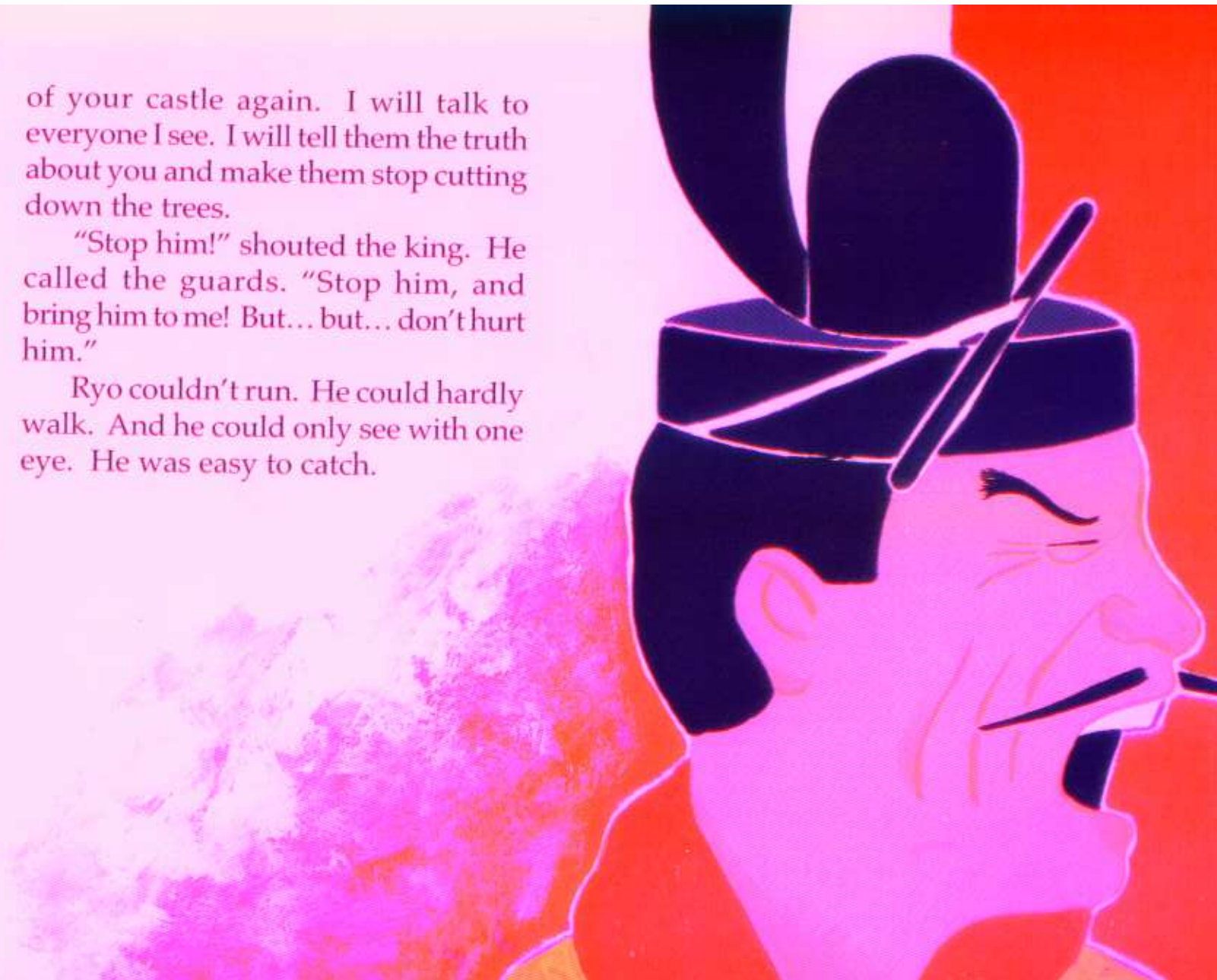
"Can't? Then I can't stand here with you." And Ryo turned to leave. He looked back at the king and shouted, "I will go out



of your castle again. I will talk to everyone I see. I will tell them the truth about you and make them stop cutting down the trees.

"Stop him!" shouted the king. He called the guards. "Stop him, and bring him to me! But... but... don't hurt him."

Ryo couldn't run. He could hardly walk. And he could only see with one eye. He was easy to catch.



A MESSAGE FROM THE MERMAID

"Ryo is at the castle! The king won't let him go!" The message reached the village. Ryo's aunt and uncle sent a message back. "We want to see Ryo." But their wish was not granted.

They went to the castle. Every day, they stood at the gate with food and clean clothes to give to Ryo. But no one would let them in. No one would even let Ryo know that they were there.

The rainy season was over, but still it rained. Cold rain fell day after day. Ryo looked out the window at the mountains. Hardly any trees were left. The rain ran off the mountainsides, in a muddy orange river. The sea grew red, and redder still as it filled with the mud running down the mountain and into the sea.

"The coral... It must be dying. And the mermaid..." He felt so sorry. He tried, but there was nothing he could do to help them. He could hardly stand it.

"Ryo! Are you all right?" It was Yu. Maybe because she was so little and harmless, the guards let her in.

She gave him the little bundle of food and clean clothes. And that's not all.

"Ryo," she confided. "I saw the mermaid. She asked me to tell you something."

"Really? A message for me?"

"Yes! I told her everything that happened to you. She said to tell you..." And Yu closed her eyes and recited the message, just the way the mermaid told it to her.



"Tell Ryo that there will be a big earthquake very soon. Tell Ryo that there will be a tidal wave. Tell Ryo that everyone must go to a safe place."

She recited the message without leaving out a thing. "Ryo? What's a tidal wave?"

But Ryo was thinking hard. "Yu! You have to go back and tell the same thing to Uncle and Aunt. And they have to tell the others. Can you tell Uncle exactly what you just told me? Ask him to tell everyone to run to a high place, away from the beach. Can you do it?"

Yu sniffed. "Of course I can."

As soon as she left, Ryo turned to the guard. "Let me talk to the king. Now! Give him this message first. Tell him, everything the mermaid said is true. A tidal wave will sweep over our island. If our people don't run from the beach and the lowlands, then they will die."





But the guard just stood there, laughing at Ryo.

"You look like an old man, but you are really still a child. Mermaids! Have you been listening to our old stories? Do you believe the one that says a mermaid will come to warn us, just before a tidal wave?"

He couldn't stop laughing. "So you believe in mermaids? You think big, pink fish can really talk? I don't think so."

"Never mind what you think. Go and tell the king!"

"All right, all right... Mermaids!" And locking the room, he walked away, still laughing.

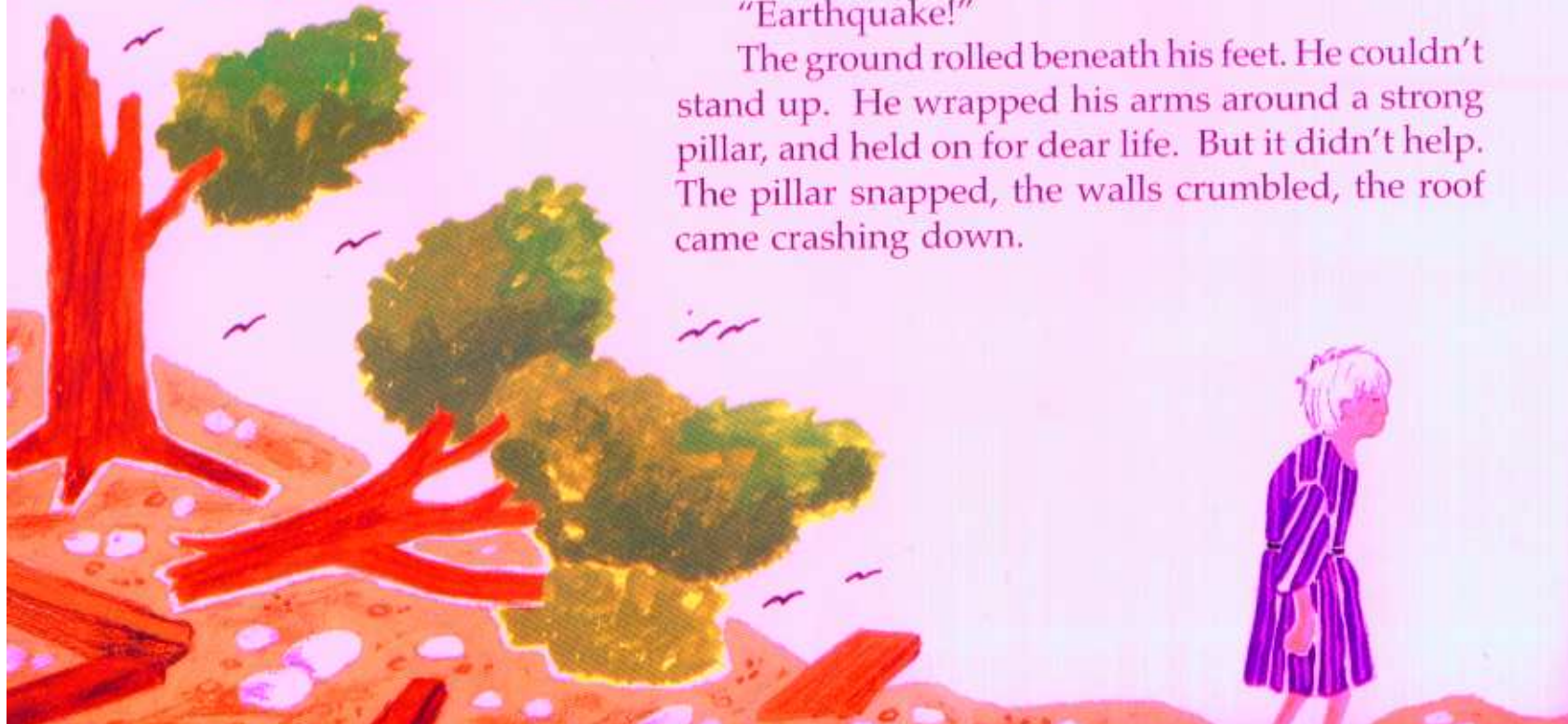
STARDUST

It was just three days after Yu had come to see him. Ryo was looking out the window, thinking of his family, the mermaid, the coral. It was night, and the full moon was rising. It glowed, full and red, a very strange colour for the moon. The air seemed to stand still. Even though it was still night, somewhere, a rooster was crowing. Birds, even the chickens, were flocking to the tops of the trees.

And then he heard a mighty roar. It came from deep inside the earth.

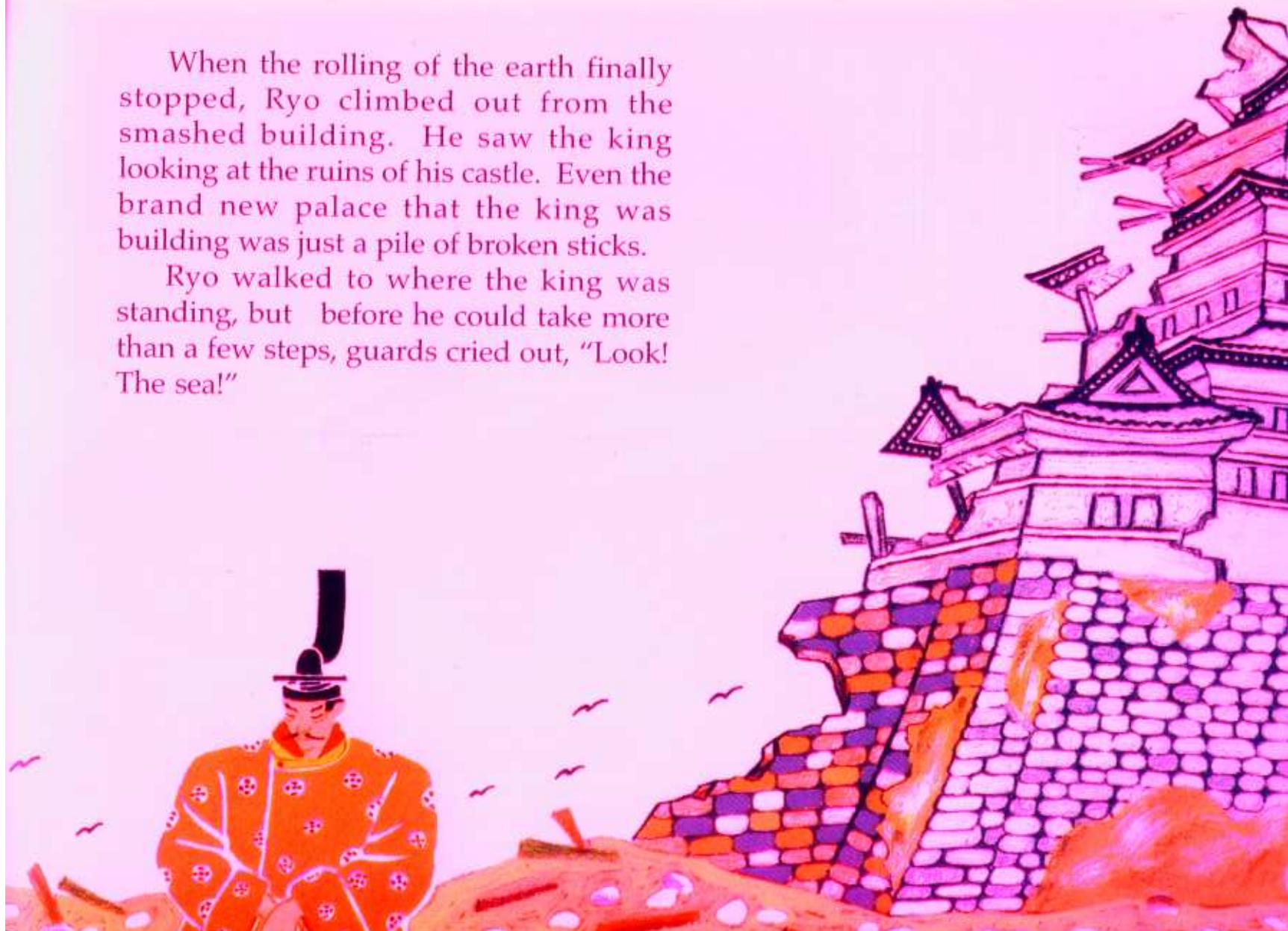
"Earthquake!"

The ground rolled beneath his feet. He couldn't stand up. He wrapped his arms around a strong pillar, and held on for dear life. But it didn't help. The pillar snapped, the walls crumbled, the roof came crashing down.



When the rolling of the earth finally stopped, Ryo climbed out from the smashed building. He saw the king looking at the ruins of his castle. Even the brand new palace that the king was building was just a pile of broken sticks.

Ryo walked to where the king was standing, but before he could take more than a few steps, guards cried out, "Look! The sea!"





Like a huge wall, the water was rising.

"Run! Run for your lives!"

Far out to sea, a huge wave was forming. Ryo could see it, lit by the moonlight. Higher, higher it rose. A huge white wall! Tons and tons of water, rising, ready to rush at the island.

In the wind, Ryo thought he heard a voice. The wind whistled and sang. He thought he heard his aunt, singing that lullaby.

"I am the star,
the star that watches over you
I am the star
that wraps you in starlight and keeps you safe.
I am the star,
the star that watches over you.
I wrap you in starlight
in every colour of the rainbow.
The mountain cries,
red tears running down its sides.
The sea rises up
to take you away.
I am your star.
I will always keep you safe.."

"Red tears running down the mountain sides! The sea rising up to wash us away! That's just what's happening now! It's just like the song. But...Where's the star? Where's the star that's supposed to save us?"

Ryo looked up, but there was nothing to see. There was only a little boy, standing alone on the beach.

Voices raced around in Ryo's head. "You're just a kid. There's nothing you can do. What is one little boy against the mighty power of the sea?"

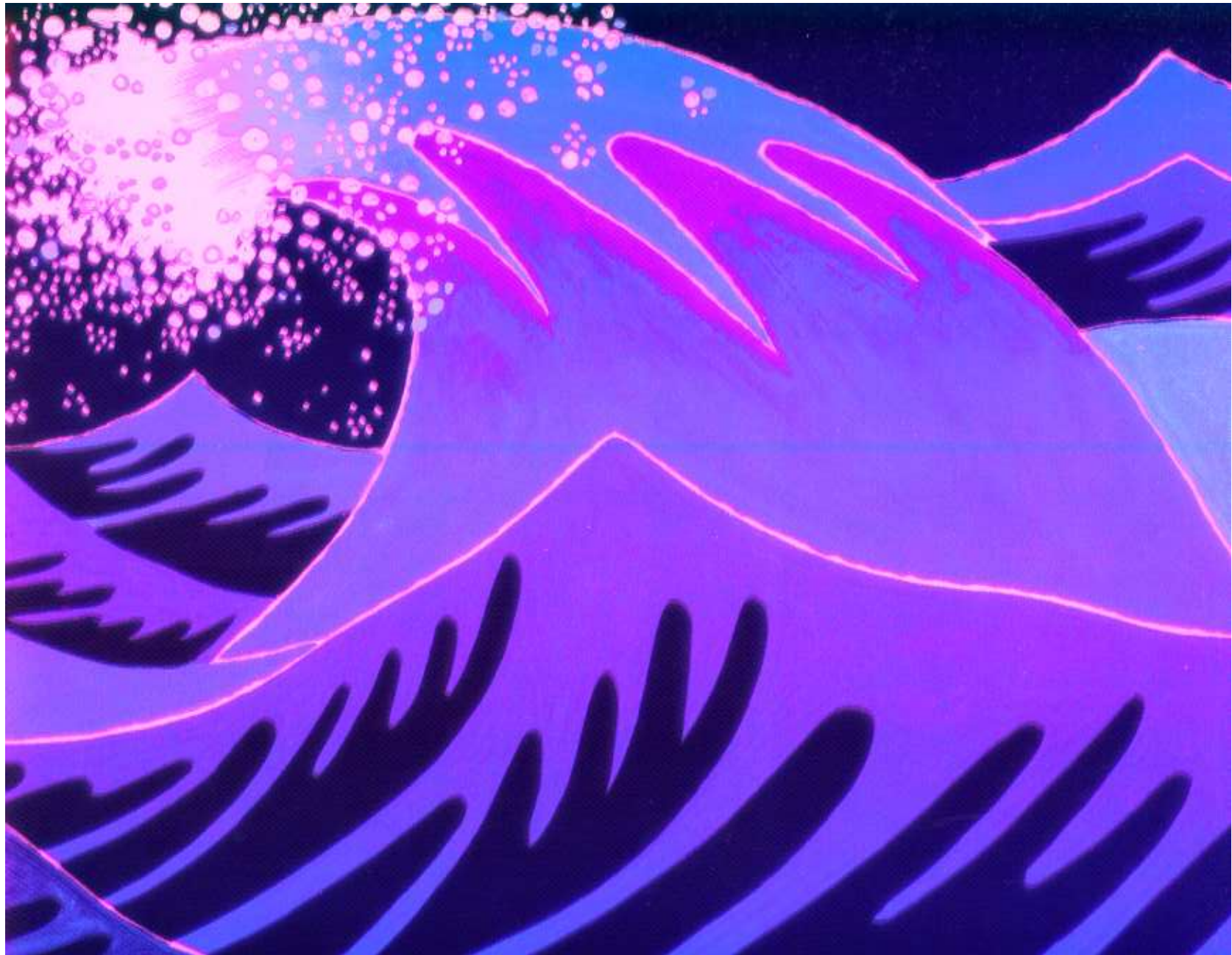
Ryo brushed aside the jumble of whispered warnings.

"There's no one but me! Maybe I am small and weak, but there's no one but me." He remembered the mermaid's story of little stars and big stars. If he had to be a star, he would be a big one, not the stingy little kind.

Everyone was running towards the mountains—the people, the guards. "I have to hurry!" Ryo told himself, and he alone ran towards the sea.

The wind was so fierce! Ryo stood up against the wild wind, and faced the sea. He held the mermaid's seashell high above. "Take me!" he cried.







"But save the island! Save my people!" He cried even louder, "Bring back the coral! Bring back the trees! Take me, but make my island safe!"

Light flashed from the highest stars. It shone all around Ryo. He felt himself lifted up. High and higher, he rode up the streak of starlight on the wild wind.

Nothing, not even a sound, was left where Ryo had been. A shower of starlight came twinkling down. It fell on the sea, and fell on the mountains. Glittering red, glittering blue, sparkles of white... It was as if every star in the sky came sprinkling down, all at once.

The tiny sparkles that fell



on the sea grew and grew into splendid branches of coral. The glitter that covered the mountains grew and grew into splendid forests of trees. As fast as the coral grew, as fast as the trees grew, just that fast the wall of water from the sea came racing towards the beach.

The giant wave came roaring in with all its might. As it raced towards the island, the arms of coral reached up and slowed it down. The trees caught the wind and slowed it down. By the time it reached the shore, the huge and angry wall of water was just a wave like any other. Ryo's island was safe.



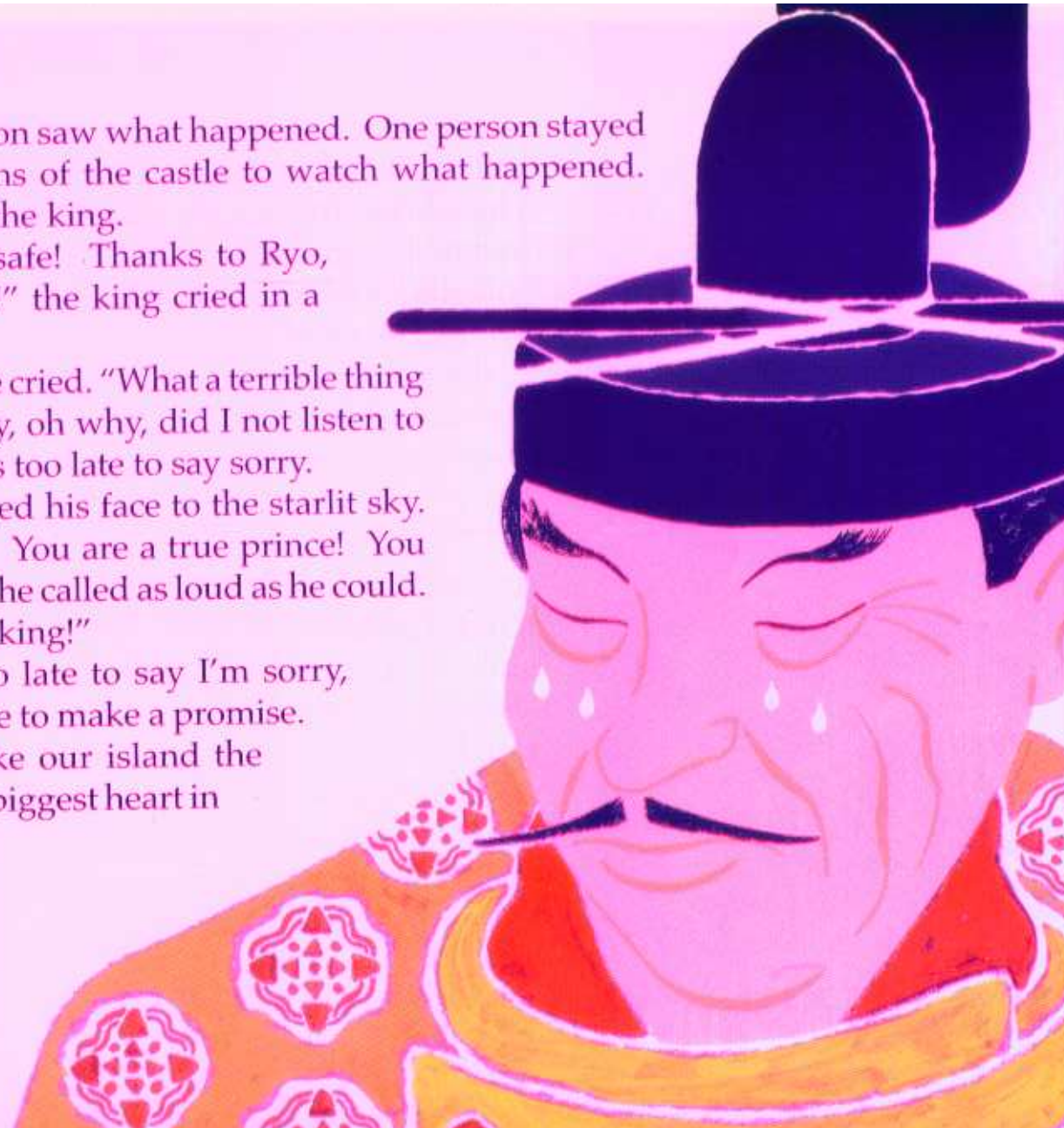
Only one person saw what happened. One person stayed behind at the ruins of the castle to watch what happened. That person was the king.

"Okinawa is safe! Thanks to Ryo, our island is safe!" the king cried in a shaky voice.

"Ryo, Ryo!" he cried. "What a terrible thing I did to you. Why, oh why, did I not listen to you..." But it was too late to say sorry.

The king turned his face to the starlit sky. "Ryo! Ken- Ryo! You are a true prince! You saved Okinawa!" he called as loud as he could. "You are the real king!"

"Ryo! It's too late to say I'm sorry, but it's not too late to make a promise. I promise to make our island the country with the biggest heart in all the world!"



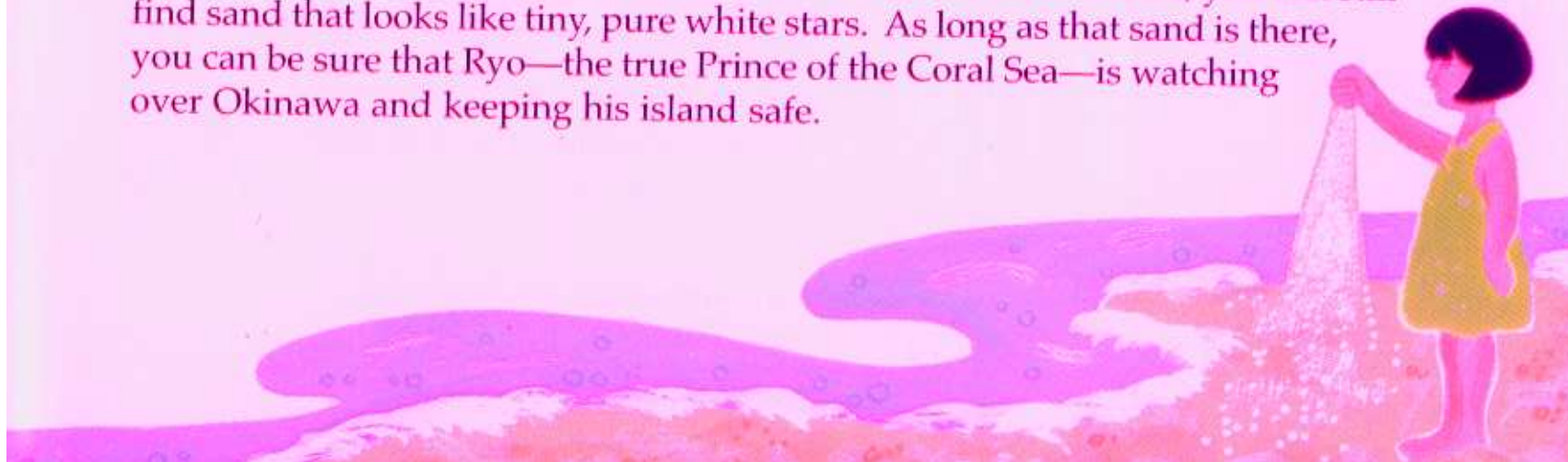
Everyone searched for Ryo. They called his name up and down the beach, up and down the mountains. But Ryo was gone. The sky was bluer than it had ever been. The red *deigo* flowers of Okinawa danced in the tree tops against the blue sky. But Ryo was nowhere to be found.


Yu went looking for him, too. Once, she thought she heard his voice, singing that song. "I am the star. I am the star that watches over you. I will always keep you safe."

She picked up a handful of beach sand, as she listened very hard and tried to hear Ryo's voice. But all she heard was the sound of gentle waves washing up on the beach, coming and going, going and coming.

She let the sand trickle out of her hand. That's when she noticed. The sand! Each tiny grain of sand sparkled white and pure. And each tiny grain of sand looked exactly like a star.

Even today, if you look at the sand on the beaches of Okinawa, you can still find sand that looks like tiny, pure white stars. As long as that sand is there, you can be sure that Ryo—the true Prince of the Coral Sea—is watching over Okinawa and keeping his island safe.





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I am the star
that wraps you in starlight
and keeps you safe.

I am the star,
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in every colour of the rainbow.

The mountain cries,
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